

In Defence of Macpherson's "Ossian."

By K. N. MACDONALD, M.D.



JAMES NORMAN METHVEN









OSSIAN AND MALVINA

# IN DEFENCE OF OSSIAN.

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BEING A SUMMARY OF THE EVIDENCE IN FAVOUR  
OF THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE POEMS.

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BY

KEITH NORMAN MACDONALD, M.D.

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# PREFACE.

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THE Poems of Ossian have now been before the public for upwards of 143 years, and the question of their authenticity has not yet been settled to the satisfaction of the disputants on both sides. The main reason for this is prejudice and ignorance of the Gaelic language, and of the manners, customs, and habits of the ancient Gaels on the part of the vast majority of the combatants in denying the possibility of such long poems being preserved and handed down mainly by oral tradition through so many centuries of time. To this it has been answered in the following pages that equally long poems have been preserved and handed down by oral tradition in other countries, and why not in this one also? The traditional tales of the Highlands have been carried down for countless generations, and if so, why not poetry or poetic prose?

True, some Celtic scholars and philologists have decided to their own satisfaction that there were no originals of the poems as we now have them; that James Macpherson created them out of stories collected from ballads. Against this we have the positive evidence of the Douay MSS., and the sworn testimony of several individuals, and the declarations of other LIVING witnesses, including many clergymen and gentlemen, of the highest character and respectability, who had heard large portions of many of them recited and compared in their presence. So far then as circumstantial and direct evidence are concerned, the existence of such poems seems as true as any fact recorded in history. The most extraordinary thing is that after the lapse of such a long period of time the slightest spark, even now, would kindle a spirit of the fiercest controversy among the hostile camps, equal to the bitterness so often engendered over religious and political questions, that it is safe to say another century must elapse before the subject can be approached on ALL sides with the calmness and temper such a question demands. I have tried to be impartial throughout, but how far I have succeeded must be left to the public. That a great deal too much is made of Irish literature in connection with these poems—mostly of a legendary nature—I feel certain, and I would suggest that all Irish history, or supposed history, and legends bearing on the subject should be collected and placed in some easily accessible locality for reference, with full and complete translations. Then and then only can comparisons be made and facts separated

## ADDITIONAL ERRATA.

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- P. 14, line 6th from top, 2nd column, omit the second "and."
- P. 37, 6th line from bottom, 2nd column, for "the" read "their."
- P. 44, line 21, 2nd column, from bottom, for "vein" read "view."
- P. 46, for "Dr James Leyden" read "Dr John Leyden."
- P. 58, 6th line in Note, for "Methink" read "Methinks."



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K. N. MACDONALD.

21 CLARENDON CRESCENT,  
EDINBURGH, 20th July, 1906.



## ERRATA.



Fourth line from bottom of Preface, for “ poems ” read “ papers.”

Page 3, 4th line from bottom, for “ indispensable ” read “ indispensable.”

Page 13, after Tacitus, 20th line from top, read “ or Agricola,” and 4th line from bottom, 2nd column, for “ Mons Grampius ” read “ Mons Granpius.”

Page 16, 12 lines from top, 2nd column, for “ Fairveasalis ” read “ Fainasolis.”

Page 22, 2nd column, for “ Homeridae ” read “ Homeridae.”

Page 37, 6th line from bottom, for “ the ” read “ their.”

Page 40, top line, 2nd column, for “ del gel ” read “ Ded-Gel ”; 7th from bottom, for “ in light ” read “ as light ” Footnote of same, for “ Cairhur,” read “ Cairbar,” and “ stri nan-duoim ” read “ stri-nan-daoiné.” For “ Aganideca,” middle of page, 2nd column, read “ Agandecca.”

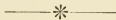
Page 51, line 10 from top, 2nd column, for “ did not publish a *translation* of the Address to the Sun,” read “ did not publish the *Gaelic* of the Address to the Sun.”

Page 58, 6th line from bottom, for “ Belgue ” read “ Belgæ ”; same page, 2nd column, 2nd line from bottom of Note, for “ pladdis ” read “ plaeddis.”

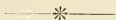
Page 66, 12th line from bottom, for “ Milesian ” read “ Milesians.”



# In Defence of Macpherson's "Ossian."



BY K. N. MACDONALD, M.D.



It must never be forgotten that James Macpherson, the translator of Ossian's poems, was only twenty-two years of age when he published his "Fragments of ancient poetry collected in the Highlands of Scotland" in 1760; twenty-four when he published "Fingal," six books, in 1762, and twenty-five when "Temora" in eight books appeared in 1763; so that if he was the sole author of all these books he must have composed "Fingal" within two years of the publication of the "Fragments," and the eight books of "Temora" in one year after the publication of "Fingal."

Anyone perusing them in both languages can hardly imagine it possible that such a young man, with little knowledge of the world, could have conceived such a vast undertaking in so short a space of time; for, if it were all a forgery, the amount of labour bestowed upon it must have been, in the language of "Dominie Sampson," "prodegeous," not the least difficult part of which was the constant alertness, indispensable to avoid betrayal of himself, and the epoch embraced by the poems, and the working of it out without running the risk of immediate

detection and disgrace and literary extinction. No sane person would have risked

## SUCH A CATASTROPHE

from pure imagination; neither could he have foreseen that any success would have attended his venture, and failure would have been most disastrous to a young aspirant to fame.

Macpherson's most bitter opponents at the time of the publication of "Fingal" and "Temora" were non-Gaelic speaking individuals, who were, in consequence, debarred from forming a correct judgment as to the merits or demerits of the case. No one who is ignorant of the Gaelic language can possibly determine whether the Gaelic was Macpherson's own composition or not, and the Gaelic scholars who do assert that he was the author have no proof whatever for the assertion. On the contrary, they differ among themselves on the subject. Dr. Stern, of Berlin, holds that Lachlan Macpherson, Strathmashie, and Dr. Thomas Ross, Lochbroom, were the composers of most of Macpherson's Gaelic; while others attribute both the Gaelic and the English to James Mac-

pherson—holding that he first composed the English, and then translated it into Gaelic. Both cannot be right; therefore their theories can't have any foundation in facts. The late Dr. Alex. Cameron, of Brodick, the best Celtic scholar of his day, and a Highlander, held that the Gaelic of "Ossian" was superior to the English, which is very remarkable if the English were the original. To use his own words:

Some of the finest songs ever written have been written in Gaelic, and Ossian's poems, though a translation, which is in itself unquestionably a work of genius, although much inferior to the Gaelic, exercised an influence upon the literature of Europe.\*

That does not tally with the opposition remarks that—

Mr Cameron does not appear to have pronounced an opinion! but his attitude on the subject seems to be indicated by a "remark" made in conversation, that not a line of the Gaelic originals which we possess, exactly corresponds with the old Ossianic ballads.

Why should they? Ossian was a genius, and the authors of the so-called Ossianic ballads were not. The stories attributed to Ossian in the *Dean of Lismore's Book* seem to be

### THIRD CLASS IMITATIONS

of Ossian doctored up ecclesiastically to correspond with St. Patrick's teaching among the infidels and brought into harmony with Church ideas. Besides, 40 years were allowed to elapse before anyone undertook the collection of these "line for line" copies of originals, and of course they could not be found in all respects identical, word for word. Many would say "I believe in the poems of Ossian, but

it is not my business to collect fresh copies." "The struggle for existence" was great, so individual effort was out of the question. In the meantime great changes were coming over the Highlands. The chiefs were being gradually won over to the side of the Government of the day; the people were disgusted, and were emigrating, and most of the old people were dying off, their customs changing, and their habits also to a great extent; hence the difficulty, indeed, the almost insuperable impossibility, of collecting "line for line" copies of all the originals of Ossian.

James Macpherson had a great advantage over the Highland Society's committee by being one of the early collectors of Gaelic poetry, and having retained the great majority of what he collected, there would be less for subsequent collectors to find. That there were originals of the poems of Ossian is as clear as any fact mentioned in history, and that James Macpherson was not the author of these poems is equally clear. It is now about 143 years since "Fingal" was first published, and considering the testimony of sworn witnesses and many eminent and highly respectable clergy and gentlemen, who had declared they had actually seen many of the originals, and frequently heard them recited by the people of the Highlands, it is futile to assert that these persons were not telling the truth. What possible object could numerous clergymen have in sustaining and perpetuating falsehoods? Many of them were

### JAMES MACPHERSON'S CONTEMPORARIES,

were good Gaelic scholars, and when they declared that Macpherson could not have

\* Lectures and addresses by Dr. Alex. Cameron, 1868.  
See "Reliquie Celtique," Vol. II., p. 530.



produced them, we are bound to admit that they were better judges of the case than we are at the present day. When a clergyman like the Rev. Don. MacLeod, of Glenelg, says:—

It was in my house that Mr Macpherson got the description of Cuchullin's horses and car, from Allan MacCaskie, schoolmaster, and Rory MacLeod, both of this glen—having recognised it in the translation,

we are bound to believe him, and that Macpherson did get original poems, and exercised his own judgment in accepting what he considered to be genuine, and rejecting what he believed not to be Ossianic. The same rev. gentleman blames Macpherson for omitting a description which Ossian (as he thought) gave of Fingal's ships, their sails, masts, riggings, etc. He also procured for Macpherson a poem entitled "The Battle of Benedin," which he considered the most finished of Ossian's works, and the most memorable of Fingal's exploits.†

Macpherson probably thought otherwise. Similarly we must believe in the testimonies of those who worked for him and with him, and saw the poems in his possession, such as Lachlan Macpherson, Strathmashie, Captain Morrison, and the Rev. Mr Gallie, Rev. Dr. John Macpherson, Sleat, Skye, and 'Rev. Angus MacNeill, Howmore, in South Uist, who heard MacDonald of Dimisdale, one of his parishioners, rehearse the terms of peace proposed by Morla, Fingal, Duan II., Fingal's order for raising his standards, pp. 57 and 58, Duan iv., his combat with Swaran, Duan v. Neil MacMhurrich also repeated, with variations, the whole

of Darthula (or Dardula), which parts of "Fingal" he knew by heart.

Lieut. Duncan MacNicol, of the 88th Regiment, found some who could repeat the following pieces, and which he compared with the translation—"Fingal," Duan iii., from "Oscar, I was young like thee," to the end of the Duan; Duan iv., from "Eight were the heroes of Ossian," mostly word for word, to the end of the Duan; the story of Orla to "Then Gaul and Swaran sat with Ossian"; most of the "Battle of Lora," "Darthula," "Temora," Duan i., "Caric-Thura," from "Who can reach the source of thy race, O Connal!" to "Dire was the clang of their steel." This gentleman added—"Those who knew most about the history of Ossian and his poems in this country are now no more."‡

Mr Alex. Macaulay, writing from Edinburgh on the 25th January, 1764, to Dr. Blair, says:—

I have wrote down the passages which Mr Macpherson, Stornoway, repeated in your house, and everyone that reads them allows that they lose by the translation. Your acquaintance, Mr Fraser, received a letter from Mr MacLagan, preacher at Anulrie, in which he mentions some detached pieces he transmitted to Macpherson, the translator; particularly several passages in the last book of "Fingal," the poem called "Erragon," or "Lora," almost entire, and a poem which bears some resemblance to the opening of "Temora." I told you formerly that I saw the originals which Mr Macpherson collected in the Highlands. Mr Fraser will assure you he saw them likewise, and was frequently present when he was translating them, and no man can say that he could impose his originals upon us, if we had common sense and a knowledge of our mother tongue.

† The Genuine Remains of Ossian, by Patrick MacGregor, M.A. 1841.

‡ Appendix Highland Society's Report.

When Lachlan Macpherson, Strathmashie, who was a classical scholar as well as a poet and country gentleman, says that he accompanied his clansman during some parts of his journey in

#### SEARCH OF THE POEMS

of Ossian, and assisted him in collecting them, and "took down from oral recitation, and transcribed from old MSS., by far the greater part of those pieces that he published, are we to understand that he was telling a deliberate falsehood? What possible object could he have in doing so? If he knew that James Macpherson had no originals, he would not have volunteered the statement. It was in this "writing down" and "transcribing" that modern changes were made in the orthography of the old MSS., so that James Macpherson could read them, and the latter specially alluded to what he called the "uncouth orthography" of some of the MSS., and admits that he himself altered the orthography of some of 'Temora,' and "connected detached parts of that poem, which he had received from various sources, as the sense and the tale or argument required," which, as a translator, he was perfectly justified in doing.

Captain Morrison also declared that when assisting him

it was their usual practice when any passage occurred which they did not understand, either to omit it entirely or to gloss it over with any expression that harmonised with the context.

The reason alleged for publishing the original of the 7th Book of Temora was "the variety of measures which occur in it."

It seems to have suffered more from reciters and transcribers than any other part of Ossian's works.

We are not concerned with what other nationalities do; but Scotsmen, and especially the Scottish clergy, for more than 300 years, have stood faithfully by the truth as being the basis of all morality and guide to their conduct, and there is no community in the world that has had fewer stray sheep. To tell us at this time of day that all these divines and professors were supporting a hollow sham is an insult to our intelligence and judgment.

The loss of the famous Douay MSS. was a very "regrettable incident" in connection with this subject, for, if they had been preserved, they would have proved conclusively the

#### EXISTENCE OF OSSIAN'S POEMS

in the Highlands long before James Macpherson's time. We have got proof enough without them; but still they would be of great assistance as a final clincher.

The Rev. John Farquharson, grand-uncle to Farquharson of Inveroy, returned to Scotland from the Continent some time between 1720 and 1730, after having obtained a thorough classical education. He was a man of excellent taste and well-known sincerity of character, and a great admirer of the ancient poets. At the time he knew little Gaelic, and commenced a serious study of it, and was assisted by Mrs Fraser of Culbokie, a celebrated Gaelic lady scholar. He learned to read the language and to write it grammatically, so that the pupil soon surpassed the teacher. This lady, by

making him acquainted with several ancient poems, gave him such a high opinion of Gaelic poetry that he was led to collect everything of that kind worth notice which fell in his way. He received many from Mrs Fraser herself, who possessed a MS. in the Gaelic character written some time after the Restoration by Mr Peter MacDonell, chaplain to Glengarry, by whom she had been taught Gaelic.

This poem was kept along with some other poems in a bag which she called "Am Balg Solair" (purveying bag). These were taken to America in 1776 by Simon Fraser, one of her sons, who was an officer in the British Service during the War of the Revolution, was taken prisoner, and died in jail, and the poems got lost.

The following memorandum was received from Bishop MacDonell by Sir John Sinclair shortly before his death:—

When James Macpherson, the translator of Ossian's Poems, was collecting the MSS. he prevailed upon his namesake, Lachlan Macpherson, of Strathmashie, in Badenoch—a gentleman of classical education, and well-known and esteemed in the Highlands on account of his poetical genius, and polished manners—to accompany him to some of the families on the west coast of Inverness-shire, who had in their possession MSS. of Ossian's poems, and carefully preserved them along with their family records. By the influence of Strathmashie these MSS. were delivered to James Macpherson on a solemn promise of returning them to their owners when the translation should be finished. It was the opinion of those who were best acquainted with both James Macpherson and Strathmashie that the former was incapable of doing justice to the original, and that whatever merit the translation may possess it is owing to Strathmashie.

The latter, however, did not live to see the work finished and revised, and the manuscripts were never returned. James Macpherson, after the death of Strathmashie, is supposed to have suppressed or destroyed them.

I was myself (continues the Bishop) requested by the widow of Angus MacDonell of Kyles, in Knoydart, when missionary in Badenoch, to demand from the said James Macpherson a MS. containing a portion of Ossian's poems, which her husband when alive had given to him on the word of Strathmashie, and I called upon him at Balavil, in Badenoch, but did not get the MS. I myself saw a large MS. of Ossian's poems in the possession of Mrs Fraser, Culbokie, in Strathglas, which she called "Am balg Sollair" (a bag of fortuitous goods), this lady's residence being between my father's house and the school where I used to attend with her grand-children at her son's, Culbokie House—she being cousin to my father. She used to take up "Am balg sollair" and read pieces. Although a very young boy at the time I got so much enraptured with the rehearsal of the achievements of the heroes of the poems, and so familiar with the characters, especially of Oscar, Cathmor, and Cuchullin, and when Macpherson's translation was put into my hands in the Scotch College of Valladolid in Spain, many years afterwards, it was like meeting old friends with whom I had been intimately acquainted. Mrs Fraser's son, Simon, who had a classical education, and was an excellent Gaelic scholar, on emigrating to America in the year 1774, took "Am balg sollair" with him as an invaluable treasure. On the breaking out of the revolutionary war in the American colonies Mr Fraser joined the Royal Standard, was taken prisoner by the Americans, and thrown into jail, where he died. I made many inquiries of the different members of the family, but could trace no vestige of the "balg sollair."

(Signed) ALEXANDER MACDONELL.

The Rev. Mr Farquharson collected two volumes of MSS. before 1745. One

was a closely written folio large paper, about three inches thick. It consisted mainly of Ossian's poems, though it contained a few modern pieces. This he brought with him about 1753, to Douay, where he had been a student, and where he was then appointed Prefect of Studies. He left the other in Braemar, where it got lost, but is supposed to have been less valuable.

Bishop Chisholm and Mr James MacGillivray, Edinburgh; Mr Ranald MacDonald, Uist; and Mr John Farquharson, Elgin, attested that they had often seen the MSS. In 1766 or 1767 Glendinning of Parton sent Mr Farquharson a copy of Macpherson's translation, and their attention was consequently more closely directed to the MSS. Mr MacGillivray was then studying poetry and rhetoric, and used, with a sort of indignation, to hear Mr Farquharson assert that the Gaelic poems were not inferior to those of Homer and Virgil.

He was (says Bishop Chisholm) a great proficient in poetry, and much admired for his taste. I never saw one more stubborn or stiff in denying the merits of Highland poets, till Macpherson's translation appeared, which, when compared to Mr Farquharson's collection, made a convert of him; and none then admired Ossian more than he.

Mr Farquharson often compared the Gaelic MS. with Macpherson's translations, and he affirmed the whole of the latter was inferior to the original.

I have (says Mr MacGillivray) an hundred times seen him turning over his folio when he read the translation, and comparing it with the Erse, and I can positively say that I saw him in this manner go through the whole poems of Fingal and Temora.

He also repeatedly said that he had

all the poems translated by Macpherson, and that he had many pieces as good as any that had been published, and that the translations in many parts were not equal to the original, or "did not come up to the strength of the original."

Mr MacGillivray returned to Scotland in 1775, and Mr Ranald MacDonald five years after. The MS. was still at Douay, when the latter left the place; but many leaves had been torn, some lost, and some were used to kindle the fire,\* and they were all of the opinion that the MSS. had been irrecoverably lost during the times of the French Revolution, if not before then.

Here, then, was another set of Bishops and clergy of another persuasion who could have no interest in perpetuating a forgery, entirely corroborating the statements of those already mentioned, which makes it as clear as anything can be that there were originals, and that James Macpherson had the originals of the poems which he published.†

In 1805, Captain MacDonald, Thurso, a native of Skye, aged 77, declared to Sir John Sinclair that he was well acquainted with James Macpherson, who took down from him many of these poems in Skye, that the poems "Ca Lodin," "Covala," and "Carrie-Thura," of which he had lately seen the copies about to be printed, were familiar to him; that he often repeated them in Gaelic up to his twentieth year; that he had also heard in Gaelic several addresses to the

\* Some Celtic scholars sneer at MSS. being lost in this way; everything should be preserved for them!

† The collections of the brothers McCallum, Dr. John Smith, "Sean Dana," and others corroborate the existence of Ossianic poetry.

sun, the moon, the evening star, and to Malvina, and likewise the Gaelic poem called 'The Six Bards.'

Evidence of the above nature could be added to to a great extent, but we consider that any intelligent person who objects to the evidence already adduced is beyond the pale of logic and reason. The mere fact that the Highland Society could find none of Ossian's poems complete is easily accounted for when we consider the multitudes that had emigrated, and the vast changes that had taken place in the Highlands during the forty years that had elapsed since Macpherson's tour; it is easily conceivable that in the interval these poems, or the remnants left by the collectors, might well have been lost.

In Dr. John Smith's Dissertation, published in 1780, he says:—

Within a century back the Highlands of Scotland have undergone a greater revolution than for ten before that period. Even since Macpherson gathered his collection, the amusements, employments, and tastes of the Highlanders are much altered. A greater attention to commerce, agriculture, and pasturage has quite engrossed that partial regard that was paid even then to the song of the bard. Among the causes which make our ancient poems vanish so rapidly, poverty and the iron rod should, in most places, have a large share. Another reason is the growth of industry, which fills up all blanks of time to better advantage, and especially the increase of more useful knowledge. Above all, the extinction of the order of the bards hastened the catastrophe of Ossian's poems.

The Rev. Alexander Pope, of Reay, remarked that "our clergy were declared enemies to the poems," and Bishop Carswell, in 1567, who lamented the sinful darkness and ignorance and evil design of those who taught and wrote and culti-

vated the Gaelic language and things concerning warriors and champions and Fingal MacCumal, and many others, was animated by the same spirit. No poems of Ossian would have been preserved by him.

The marvel is that they lived in spite of him; but it may be taken for granted that all ecclesiastics in these days would narrowly scrutinize everything they permitted to see the light, hence the weakness of the Dean of Lismore's specimens.

In perceiving and asserting the merit of Gaelic poetry, Macpherson was anticipated by Jerome Stone, a native of Fife, who kept a school at Dunkeld, and there learned Gaelic. In a letter dated 15th November, 1775, to the editor of the "Scots Magazine," accompanied with a rhythmical version of an old poem called "The Death of Fraoch," he says:

Those who have any tolerable acquaintance with the Irish language must know that there are a great number of poetical compositions in it, and some of them of very great antiquity, whose merit entitles them to an exemption from the unfortunate neglect, or rather abhorrence to which ignorance has subjected that emphatic language in which they were composed. Several of these performances are to be met with, which for sublimity of sentiment, nervousness of expression, and high spirited metaphor are hardly to be equalled among the chief productions of the most cultivated nations. Others of them breathe such tenderness and simplicity as must be affecting to every mind that is in the least tinctured with the softer passions of pity and humanity.

With regard to the modernisms which the Highland Society thought were to be discovered in the 7th Book of "Temora," they were merely certain Gaelic words which resemble Latin, English, etc..



industriously pointed out as detections by Mr Malcolm Laing. The same modernisms, according to Mr P. MacGregor, M.A., abound in every Gaelic book, but "with respect to the style of that Duan I can discover no difference between it and the rest of Ossian's real works." And Dr. Clerk says:—

Unfortunately, nothing can be deduced from the spelling of these poems, as they were modernised before being published, and we have not even Macpherson's own transcript of them. The only specimens of his Gaelic which, as far as I know, remain to us, are the 7th book of "Temora," which he published at the end of his collection in 1763, and a portion of "Carrie-Thura," given in the Highland Soc. Rep. The orthography of the 7th book of "Temora" is different from any other Gaelic which I have met with, and there are two peculiarities belonging to it, which I would briefly point out. There is a "destitutio tenuium"—the hard consonants c, p, t are used where the soft ones g, b, d are now written, and let it be remembered that the use of the hard, instead of the soft consonants is the test which Zeuss has applied to determine the age of Celtic writings.

Strathmashie gets the credit of writing this book, and that he left the MS. of it among his papers, with corrections and interlineations, but Dr. Clerk, who had been in the habit of visiting Badenoch for 20 years, says he could never get hold of the MS., or of any one who had seen or heard of it.\* In Gillies' Collection, published in 1786, some of Strathmashie's songs are given, and as Gillies knew nothing of Gaelic, we must conclude they were printed from the author's own writing. Their orthography corresponds in all things with that of the period, and is widely different from "Temora."

\* Dr. Clerk's Ossian.

Macpherson says in a prefatory note that he altered the orthography in many instances, but the

striking peculiarities of this Duan afford at least a presumption of its having been transcribed from an old writing. If we look at the internal evidence from the nature of the poetry, any one can see that they could not have been composed by any modern writer. The character of the poetry is primitive and simple. We have nature pure and primitive, dealt with by man in a very primitive state, and treated in a manner without example elsewhere. There is no allusion to agriculture or commerce, to arts or sciences, to laws or ordinances, and there is not the remotest reference to Christianity or to any of the great moral and social changes which it brings in its train. There is no abstraction or generalisation of ideas. Objects are dealt with individually as they present themselves at the first glance. And least of all is there a trace of that subjective, self-reflecting, moral picturing of the outer world, which we find in the poetry produced by the high culture of modern days. The mind is, in a sense, passive in the act of perception, and the poetry reflects the face of nature with the unimpassioned fidelity of a mirror. Ossian gives back the face of nature simply and purely as it impressed itself upon his eye, without a trace of self once colouring the image: but he depicts the image so vividly and clearly as to show the true poetic vision. Many of his descriptions are unsurpassed, if not unequalled, by any other poet, ancient or modern.

It may, perhaps, be possible for a man who has been trained under the power of Christianity, of classical learning, and of the endlessly-diversified influences which unconsciously mould us to what we are in modern days, to divest himself of the effects of all these, to travel back on his journey of life, stripping himself of every fold of being which gathered round him as he advanced, to step beyond the sway of every acquired mental habit and association, and occupy ground entirely new and strange. This may perhaps be possible:

but it will not be credible until stronger evidence of the accomplishment of such a marvellous feat be afforded than any which the world has yet beheld. And therefore I hold the improbability of modern or mediæval authorship for Ossian's poems to be incalculably greater than that of an ancient one.†

One of the most difficult points in connection with the poems of Ossian is the language in which they are written. Barring a few obsolete words like "os" for deer, "sionaidh" for master, "iuthaidh" for arrow, etc., the language in its vocables is the language of

#### MODERN TIMES,

and it is at once pronounced impossible that this should be at the same time ancient, but it must never be forgotten that most of these poems were collected and transcribed from oral tradition, and those MSS. that were in the old character were also modernised to suit and assist James Macpherson.‡

The impossibility, however, is not so certain when we look to facts in regard to other languages. The Norse language, as Professor Muller testifies, remained unchanged for seven centuries, and the Greek language has undergone no vital change for two thousand years. The Highlands have been so isolated as to give every chance of permanency, and to this day Scottish Gaelic is far freer of foreign admixture than its cognate tongues in Wales and Ireland. The public recitation of ancient tales and poems by the bardic order helped greatly to preserve the language, and we have some documents

showing that the change has not been great for the last four hundred years.

In the national MSS. of Scotland there is a charter of lands in Islay granted by MacDonald, Lord of the Isles and Earl of Ross, to Brian Vicar MacKay. It is dated May, 1408, and is written in Gaelic, which any intelligent Highlander will readily understand. In fact, it only contains one word that has

#### BECOME OBSOLETE.

The battle song of the MacDonalds, recited at the battle of Harlaw in 1411, is also modern in its terms.

Another singular thing is that "in the older life of St. Kentigern, written prior to 1164, it is said that Servanus at Culross, when he heard of Kentigern's birth, exclaimed—"A dia cur fir sin." In modern Scotch Gaelic the phrase would be—"A Dhia gur fìor sin" (probably "A Dhia cuir fìor sin" or "cuir sin fìor")—"God make that true; be it so!"). These scraps are similar to the Gaelic of Ossian, the Gaelic now in use, and, scanty as they are, they show, as far as they go, that Gaelic has undergone little change for several hundred years back.

At the same time, there are other and more numerous documents which, on the other hand, seem to show the changes within the same period to have been very great. The Dean of Lismore's Book, on account of its very peculiar phonography, can scarcely be quoted as a competent witness on the question. But the "Book of Deer," in the 12th century, and several of the MSS. in the Advocates' Library, are widely different from any modern Gaelic.||

† Dr Clerk's Ossian, 1871.

‡ See Macpherson, Strathmashie's declaration, in which he says that he transcribed most of the poems for his namesake and clansman.

|| Dr Clerk's Ossian.

It is probable that a monkish and a bardic Gaelic ran side by side—that in the one case we have the vernacular of the people, in the other the learned dialect written by scholars. Be that as it may, nothing can be founded with certainty on the mere vocables of Ossian. But the structure and arrangement—the syntax is most certainly ancient. It is undeniably very different from what we find in

#### ANY MODERN GAELIC,

and how James Macpherson could have invented the whole thing out of his own head only adds to the mystery.

As to whether the poems are mythical or historical, there is a good deal that we can't prove, but, at the same time, we can show something in favour of their historical origin.

The dazzling names given in the poems, such as "Fionnghal" (Fingal), "White" (White), "Clann Baoisgne" (the children of brightness). Fingal's standard was "Deò-grèine," or "Sunbeam"; his wife was Ros-grèine, Roscrana, or Grainè, also signifying "sunbeam," or the "eyelid of the sun"; and the romantic elopement of the latter with Diarmid, in whose name we have "light and atmosphere," favour the mythical, but the Ossianic poems grew round these names, and we must accept them as we find them. Professor Max Muller says that "the story of Helen is a dawn myth," and that "the siege of Troy has no historic basis."<sup>4</sup>

We cannot prove the reality of the special battles which Ossian describes, whether with Caracal or with Swaran, because all we have of the early Scottish annals or histories are not to be relied on for accuracy of statement, but putting one and two together we are justified in believing they are historical in the sense of truly depicting the manners of the

times in which they were composed or written. It is worth observing, however, that Barbour, in 1357, mentions both Fingal and Gaul, the son of Morni, and Bishop Leslie, in 1758, places Fingal, the son of Cuhal, in the fifth century, showing that the belief in the existence and antiquity of these heroes prevailed among the Saxon inhabitants of Scotland, as well as among the Celts, and could not in consequence have been the invention of James Macpherson.

One very important fact mentioned by the late Mr Skene in his "Essay on the Highlanders," Vol. I., p. 206-216, is of great consequence in deciding this question. He says that the account given of the Irish Kings in Ossian is

#### DIAMETRICALLY OPPOSED

to that given by the Irish historians, who quoted from the monkish chroniclers of the fourteenth century. But the *Annals of Tighernac*, first published in 1825, agree entirely with Ossian! These annals, written in the eleventh century, were absolutely unknown in Macpherson's day. He could not possibly have had access to them. It follows then, that the historic position of Ossian is older than the fourteenth century, and is based on truth. He adds in a note (p. 213) a striking confirmation by the celebrated antiquary Finn Macnussen who proves that the religion of the Lochlaners, as described by Ossian, is a correct picture of the ancient religion of the Scandinavians, and that the real nature of that religion could not have been known to Macpherson, being unknown to modern scholars at the time.

Now, if the story had been all the

<sup>4</sup> Science of Language, second series, pp. 399 and 472.



other way, and the Irish historians had been right and Macpherson wrong, no epithet would have been strong enough to hurl at the head of this much abused and ill-used patriotic Highlander.

As he had never been to Ireland or to Scandinavia, there can be no getting out of the fact that his knowledge on the above points was obtained from the poems he was translating, and is worth a score of samples from the ballads or the Dean of Lismore's phonetic Gaelic. Another very important fact mentioned by the Rev. Dr. John Smith, of Campbeltown, the collector of "Sean Dana," places beyond dispute Macpherson's bona fides. The prevalence of Ossianic names throughout the topography of the Highlands enables us to identify many localities. Some of the scenes which the poems describe were so obscure that the translator of Ossian never heard of them, even in tradition, so that Macpherson must have found them in MSS., otherwise he could not have mentioned them. These allude to the tragic story of Daura and Erath, and the island to which the traitor Erath beguiled Daura in one of the songs of Selma.

In Dr. Smith's time

These names had never been heard of in name, surname, or tradition, yet in an out-of-the-way place, in Argyllshire, which it is certain the translator of Ossian never saw, and which from his own silence—the silence of tradition—upon that story, and the distance and obscurity of the place, it is equally certain he never heard of; in this place can be traced out the very scene and the very uncommon names of that episode, which of all the collection is perhaps the least known to a Gaelic antiquary. The island to which Erath beguiled Daura still retains his name of "Innis

Eraith" (the island of Erath). The ferry and farm contiguous to it derive from him also their name, and about a mile distant from it is another farm, consisting of an extensive heath bounded by a large mountain-stream, and still retaining from that unfortunate lady the name of "Dur a' in" (the stream of Daura). And what further confirms that this is the scene described by Ossian is that several places within sight of it are denominated from Connal and others of his heroes, whose names are better known. As nobody can suppose that the translator of Ossian could thus stumble by chance on names the least common and places the least known, so as to make so many circumstances exactly correspond with his poems, without his ever knowing it, we must certainly allow this a most confounding proof of their authenticity.\*

Similarly, if Tacitus had not actually seen and described the war chariots of the ancient Caledonians, no Celtic scholar would believe for one moment that such a thing ever existed among such a primitive people. What the late Professor Blackie termed "Saxon ignorance and insolence" was well exemplified in Wordsworth's "Essay on Poetry," when he says that "Morven contains scarcely an acre of ground sufficiently accommodating for a sledge to be trailed along its surface." He mistook the parish of Morvern for the wide country of Mor-Bheinn—"great mountains"—and mentions as a proof of modern origin what is in reality

#### AN UNANSWERABLE ARGUMENT

in favour of the great antiquity of the poems of Ossian. At the battle of the "Mons Grampius" (the Grampian mountains) in the 1st century, "the first line of the Caledonians descended to the plain, which trembled beneath the

\* "Smith's Gaelic Antiquities," 1780.

galloping of the horses and the rolling of the war chariots,"† and the "barbarians" had the advantage as long as they fought at a distance "with javelins and arrows."

In those days each chariot contained a charioteer with one or two warriors, and when they had thrown the enemy into confusion, which Cæsar admits they often did, the warriors leapt from the chariots and fought on foot.

The horses which the Caledonians employed in their war chariots were a small breed, but swift, spirited, and hardy—Cuchullin's were larger animals. The cavalry were accustomed, like the car-borne warriors, to dismount on fitting occasions, and to fight on foot. The infantry, according to Tacitus, constituted the main strength of the armies of the Caledonians. Their swiftness of foot and expertness in swimming over rivers and crossing fens and marshes, gave them a great advantage in making sudden attacks and retreats. Like their Highland descendants they were in the habit of throwing off the greater part of their clothing before closing with their adversaries in a hand to hand conflict. They were armed with a spear and a long sword, without a point, and only meant for cutting.‡

In their conflicts with the Romans, the Caledonians displayed some knowledge of military tactics. The infantry was usually placed in the centre, and the cavalry and chariots on the wings. The waggons which contained their families were stationed in the rear, and served as

a barrier for its protection, while the presence of these spectators of the engagements, and the shrill cries which they were in the habit of raising, acted as an incentive to their fathers, husbands, sons, brothers, and lovers, and to fight to the last in defence of all that was dear to them.§ Well might Galgacus term them "*nobilissimi totius Britannia.*"

We shall now pause for a brief space of time and ask a question. Tacitus allowed seventeen years to elapse after the events before writing the life of his father-in-law, Agricola. Now, supposing he had died in the interval, and that Cæsar had also died before writing his "*De Bello Gallic,*" and that the question of chariots having been used by

#### THE ANCIENT CALEDONIANS

had been carried down by tradition only, what would the indignant Celtic scholar say? He would at once, with flaming eyes, exclaim, "No one but a fool would believe in such rubbish," and he would point out that at Bannockburn, Harlaw, Inverlochy, Killiecrankie, and Culloden there were no chariots as proof of his contention, and would probably point out how easy it would have been for a charioteer to have swung round and cut the Duke of Cumberland's head off had any been present at the latter battle, and then sink back in his chair perfectly conscious that he was the embodiment of all historical accuracy, wisdom, and profound and indefatigable research!

The armouries of the Britons were generally furnished with helmets, shields, and chariots, and with spears, daggers,

† "Cassell's History of England," 1905.

‡ "Tacitus, *Argric.*," c. 36.

§ "The Pictorial History of Scotland," by James Taylor, D.D.

swords, battle axes, and bows. The helmets and chariots were confined to the chiefs, and the common men fought on foot, provided with shields for their defence, and with spears, swords, daggers, bows, and battle axes for opposing the enemy. Most of these accoutrements have been found in the graves of warriors and tumuli. The Caledonian army and chariots encountered by Agricola's legions at the foot of the Grampians only wanted union and discipline to have enabled a gallant people with such armour to repel their invading foes.‡

It is said that these poems are Macpherson's own composition, written first in English, and subsequently translated into Gaelic. This theory charges with

#### DELIBERATE FALSEHOOD

—in many instances with perjury—the many respectable clergymen and gentlemen whose testimony has already been quoted, for some of them declare most positively that they assisted Macpherson before the publication of his English in translating Gaelic MSS, which it is most certain he had.¶ One reason, no doubt, for this belief was the use of the word “author” by Macpherson on several occasions when alluding to his work as a translator.

In his preface to the 1773 edition (London, August 15), he says:—

Without increasing his genius, the author may have improved his language in the eleven years that the following poems have been in the hands of the public. Errors in diction might have been committed at twenty-four, which the experience of a riper age may re-

move, and some exuberance of imagery may be restrained with advantage by a degree of judgment acquired in the progress of time.

Impressed with this opinion, he ran over the whole with attention and accuracy, and he hopes he has brought the work to a state of correctness, which will preclude all future improvements.

The above evidence alludes to the English only.

In the same preface he goes on—

All the polite nations of Europe have transferred them into their respective languages; and they speak of him, who brought them to light, in terms that might flatter the vanity of one fond of fame. In a convenient indifference for a literary reputation, the author hears praise without being elevated, and ribaldry without being depressed. When rivers define the limits of abilities, as well as the boundaries of countries, a writer may measure his success by the latitude under which he was born. It was to avoid a part of this inconvenience that the author is said, by some, who speak without any authority, to have ascribed his own productions to another name. If this was the case he was but young in the art of deception. When he placed the poet in antiquity the translator should have have been born on this side of the Tweed.†

It is quite clear from the context here that the use of the word “author” refers to the English only, as he expressly speaks of himself as the “translator.” His original intention was to publish the poems in rhyme or verse, “though he yielded to the judgment of others\* in a mode which presented freedom and dignity of expression, instead of fetters which cramp the thought, whilst the harmony of language is preserved.” Here is another proof of the existence of Gaelic poems in MSS. Still in the same preface

‡ “Caledonia,” Vol. I., by George Chalmers, F.R.A. and I.A., 1807.

¶ Dr Clerk's “Ossian.”

† The above shows how much Macpherson's pride was hurt.

\* Especially John Holme, the author of “Douglas.”

he goes on—"It is, however, doubtful whether the harmony which these poems might derive from rhyme, even in much better hands than those of the 'Translator,' could atone for the simplicity and energy which they would lose"—a further proof of his considering himself a translator only.

Further "confounding proofs" in favour of Macpherson's "Ossian," and against its having been compiled from the ballads, are the following:—

The Rev. Dr. John Macpherson, of Sleat, Isle of Skye, author of "Critical Dissertations on the Origin, Language, Government, Manners, and Religion of the Ancient Caledonians," etc., published in London in the year 1768, evidently a very competent authority and master of the Celtic in all its branches, writing to Dr. Hugh Blair, professor of Literature and Belles Lettres in the University of Edinburgh, on the 27th of November, 1763, says:—

I have perused a Gaelic manuscript containing all the poems translated by Macpherson, and can honestly affirm that I have seen a Gaelic manuscript in the hands of an old bard who travelled about the Highlands and Isles about 30 years ago, out of which he read in my hearing, and before thousands yet alive, the exploits of Cuchullin, Fingal, Oscar, Ossian, Gaul, Dermid, and other heroes celebrated in Macpherson's book. This bard was descended from a race of ancestors who had served the family of Clanranald for about 300 years in quality of bards and genealogists, and whose predecessors had been employed in the same office by the Lords of the Isles long before the family of Clanranald existed.

He proceeds:—

I have made enquiry for all the persons who were able to rehearse from memory any parts of the poems published by Macpherson,

and have made them rehearse in my hearing the several fragments or detached pieces of these poems which they were able to repeat. This done, I compared with great care the pieces rehearsed by them, with Macpherson's translations. These pieces or fragments are as follows:—

(1) The description of Cuchullin's chariot—Fingal, Book I., p. 11. The rehearsers are John MacDonald of Breakish, in Strath, Isle of Skye, gentleman; Martin MacGillivray, tenant in Sleat; and Allan Macaskie, farmer, in Glenelg.

(2) The episode relating to Fairveasalis—Fingal, Book III., p. 45. The rehearsers are, among many more, John MacDonald of Breakish; Alex. MacDonald, merchant in Sleat; John Down, cowherd there; and John MacLean, carpenter in the parish of Strath.

(3) The actions of Ossian at the lake of Lego, and his courtship of Everallin—Fingal, Book IV., p. 50. The rehearsers are Alexander MacDonald, merchant in Sleat; Nicol MacKenzie in the parish of Strath, gentleman; and Ewan Macpherson, schoolmaster, Glenelg.

(4) Fingal's combat with the King of Lochlin—Fingal, Book V., p. 62. The rehearsers are Alex. MacDonald, merchant in Sleat; Donald Robertson, tenant, there; and Nicol MacKenzie, just mentioned, together with many more.

(5) The Battle of Lora, p. 111. The rehearsers are Alex. MacDonald, merchant in Sleat; John MacLean, carpenter in Strath; and Neil MacKinnon, farmer, there.

(6) Darthula, p. 155. The rehearsers are Alex. Morrison, in the parish of Durinish; Ewan Macpherson, schoolmaster, Glenelg; and John Down, cowherd in Sleat.

(7) The combat between Oscar and Ullin in the "fragments." The rehearsers are John MacDonald of Breackish, Alex. Morrison, and John Down, above mentioned.

(8) The lamentation of the spouse of Dargo, sung by thousands in the isles.

Now, these eight poems, or portions of poems, are not from the ballads, but the same as in Macpherson's published work,

and they have the impress of truth stamped upon them. Besides these, the Rev. Mr MacDiarmid, of Weem, Perth shire, got Ossian's Addresses to the Sun as they are in "Carthon" and "Carrick-Thura," about 1770, from the recitation of an old man in Glenlyon, who had

#### LEARNED THEM IN HIS YOUTH

from people in the same glen. These beautiful addresses were particularly pointed out as glaring forgeries! Several other clergymen also verified pieces from "Fingal," Books II., IV., and V., and the Rev. Dr. Hugh MacLeod, professor of Church History in the University of Glasgow, assured Lord Bannatyne that he had seen and examined several Gaelic manuscripts partly written upon vellum, and apparently of great antiquity, in the possession of James Macpherson, containing poetry mixed with other compositions.

The Rev. Mr Anderson, minister of Kingussie—one of Macpherson's executors—after informing the committee of the Highland Society that all Macpherson's papers relating to Ossian were in London, transmitted as the only thing he had in his possession, an exact copy of certain notes written in James Macpherson's hand upon the margin of a copy of the first edition of his translation of "Ossian," which had been left at Mr Macpherson's Highland residence, and which Mr Anderson found there. These are as follows, marked as under in Macpherson's hand writing, and initialled :

(1) Delivered the 3 Duans of Cathloda to Mr John MacKenzie as complete as the translation.—J. M.—Cathloda.

(2) Delivered the whole of Carrick-Thura to Mr John MacKenzie.—J. M.—Carrick-Thura.

(3) Delivered all that could be found of

Carthon to Mr John MacKenzie.—J. M.—Carthon.

At the words "have I not seen the fallen Balclutha," there is marked on the margin, in Macpherson's handwriting, "all before this given to Mr MacKenzie."

(4) Delivered the whole of Oina Morul to Mr John MacKenzie.—J. M.—Oina Morul.

(5) Delivered the whole of Colna-Dona to Mr John MacKenzie.—J. M.—Colna-Dona.

(6) Delivered the whole of Croma to Mr John MacKenzie.—J. M.—Croma.

(7) The original of Calthon and Colmal given to Mr John MacKenzie.—J. M.—Calthon and Colmal.

(8) The original of the poem of Fingal given to Mr John MacKenzie.—J. M.—Fingal.

The eight pieces rehearsed in the presence of the Rev. Dr. John Macpherson with the two Addresses to the Sun, and the eight poems left by Macpherson himself in a bona-fide manner, can't be thrown over by simply denying the existence of such facts. There is nothing in the world easier than to deny evidence of this kind in a few solitary instances. It is the cumulative effect that tells when conjoined with other evidence, and the putting of one and two together, including the discrepancies of self-constituted experts among themselves, and the bias and cast of their writings that enable us to separate the wheat from the chaff. When a man who does not know a word of Gaelic, like the author of the last work on "James Macpherson," published in April, 1905,† remarks on the second page of his preface that Macpherson is "now a detected impostor," and doubts the bona fides of the Rev. Mr MacDiarmid, of Weem, regarding the discovery of the Addresses to the Sun, impartiality is

† David Nutt, London, 1905.



## THE LAST THING

one would expect from such a person. How can anyone who is ignorant of a language tell whether it is "unidiomatic" or not? I know of several individuals who make use of the expression, and yet can't read a word of the Gaelic of "Ossian!" Some people seem to think that Macpherson had no right to reject poems which he considered were not composed by Ossian. This power of selection and rejection belongs to the individual exercising his judgment.

For instance, I reject Mr J. F. Campbell's statement that "Ossian is a fiction," but I accept the following facts from his essay on Ossian:—

It has been proved that there were old Gaelic traditional poems, collectors of them, and men who made English paraphrases from them under the name of translations, long before Macpherson's time. The affidavit of Archibald Fletcher, January, 1801, No. XVI. of the appendix of the Highland Society's report, gives a list of poems collected by Fletcher himself, filling 194 pages, and deposited with the Society, and he names men with whom Macpherson spoke, and who knew such poems.

No. XV. of the same appendix gives 70 pages of comparison of the Society, and Macpherson's translation of Fingal, and these prove to demonstration that the poem, in some form, was known to the people, and that the published poem is not the popular version, though like it.\*

Captain Morrison's evidence, No. XIII., is conclusive on that point, and proves that Macpherson had in his possession a great many such poems, orally collected in Scotland, and that they appear in his English works.

If they do, how can he be called a forger, and "Ossian a fiction?"

Kennedy gives a list of 17 persons from whose dictation he procured Gaelic poems, which he sold to the Highland Society, and which he collected between 1774 and 1783. It is beyond all dispute that there were traditional poems in plenty, written and unwritten, attributed to Ossian, current in the Highlands and accessible to Macpherson, many of which can still be traced in Ossian.

If so, he must have had originals, and did not get them from "legends written down in Scottish Gaelic, and existing in Irish MSS.," as the Encyclopædia Britannica asserts.

The "fragments" are believed to be perfectly genuine, though very free translations, and include a bit of Fingal.

The Berlin critic, Dr. Stern, considers them as bad, or worse, forgeries than the rest!

The fight is about the next and following publications (Fingal and Temora), and the evidence given by the men who set Macpherson to work is so strongly in favour of their general authenticity, so far as Macpherson is concerned, that it is hard to believe him to have been a mere forger; he must have had something more than we now know anything about.

That is just what we contend for. Dr. Blair saw his papers, so did the Rev. Mr Gallie, Strathmashie, and Captain Morrison, and Professor Adam Ferguson, who understood Gaelic, looked at them, and compared them with the translations as they were made, and these appeared to be exact and faithful in any parts which were so read and compared.

It is proved, then, that before 1760, when Macpherson made his tour, there were plenty of MS. and traditional poems current in the Highlands, and that he collected and used them. Mr Gallie Lord Lynedoch, Dr. Ferguson, and others saw him engaged upon these materials, and he had no respect for his authorities, new or old.

\* There was nothing to prevent Macpherson getting the version he published.

It is not exactly fair to say that he had no respect for his authorities. What Macpherson had no patience with was the spurious poems which he professed to detect easily. These he had rejected with scorn and contempt, as is well exemplified in the following passage from Mr Gallie's letter, dated 4th March, 1801:—"I remember Mr Macpherson reading the MSS. found in Clanranald's, execrating the bard who dictated to the amanuensis saying, 'd——n the scoundrel; it is himself that now speaks, not Ossian.' This took place in my house in two or three instances," and is very good circumstantial evidence in favour of his anxiety to produce the pure works of Ossian, and corroborates Hugh MacDonald's declaration in Gaelic, signed at Tigheary, in North Uist, on the 12th August, 1800.

"Many poets after Ossian endeavoured to copy or imitate him; but there is no man that understands our tongue, or the nature of the poetry, but will, on the first hearing of the first verses, easily distinguish their poems from his.

That's just what Macpherson did.

James Macpherson's name is not the only one implicated in this affair. The reputations of the following list of clergymen, noblemen, and gentlemen must stand or fall with Macpherson. There can be no doubt at all about that, and those who give away the reputations of their countrymen without a thorough conviction and proof have little idea how they play into the hands of the enemies of their country and the appearance they will make in future Ossianic history. The man who could denounce "the pious and learned" Dr. John Smith, Campbeltown,

does not wait to consider the gravity of his statement, for he can point out to some of our countrymen who do the same! It will be borne in mind that this list consists almost entirely of Gaelic-speaking clergymen and gentlemen who believed in James Macpherson's bona fides, many of whom had actually seen and heard the poems, or many of them, recited before and after Macpherson's works were published. They are:—

Rev. Andrew Gallie, Badenoch.

Rev. James MacLagan, Amulrie and Blair Atholl.

Rev. Dr. John Smith, compiler of "Sean Dana."

Rev. Mr MacDiarmid, Weem, Perthshire.

Rev. Mr Anderson, Kingussie.

Rev. Dr. John Macpherson, Sleat, Isle of Skye; Rev. Donald MacLeod, Glenelg.

Rev. Donald MacQueen, Kilmuir, Skye.

Rev. Mr Sage, Kildonan, Sutherland.

Rev. Alex. Pope, Reay, Sutherland.

Rev. J. Wodrow, Islav.

Rev. Malcolm MacDonald, Tarbert, Cantyre.

Rev. Mr Stewart, Craginish.

Rev. Dr. Stewart, Luss (Gaelic scholar).

Rev. Dr. Kemp (friend of Andrew Gallie).

Rev. Dr. Adam Ferguson, Professor of Moral Philosophy, Edinburgh.

Rev. Dr. Graham, Aberfoyle, author of essay on Ossian; Rev. Bishop MacDonell.

Rev. Alex. Macfarlane, scholar, Arrochar, Dumbartonshire; Rev. Mr McLeod, Harris.

Rev. Dr. Hugh MacLeod, Professor of Church History, Glasgow.

Rev. Lewis Grant, Duthil, Inverness-shire.

Rev. Angus MacNeill, Howmore, South Uist.

Rev. Neil MacLeod, Ross of Mull.

Rev. Alex. MacAulay, chaplain, 88th Regiment, Edinburgh.

Rev. Edmund MacQueen, Barra.

Rev. James MacQueen, missionary, N. Uist.

Rev. Alex. Nicolson, Thurso.

Rev. Dr. Carlyle, Musselburgh.

Rev. Dr. Hugh Blair (non Gaelic) Professor of Literature and Belles Lettres, Edinburgh.

Rev. John Farquharson, Strathglass, after of Douay, France; Rev. Dr. Irvine, Dunkeld.  
 Rev. Mr MacDonald, Anstruther.  
 Rev. Mr Macfarlane, London.  
 Rev. Donald MacNicol, Lismore.  
 Rev. Peter MacDonald, chaplain to Glengarry.  
 Rev. Dr. Macintyre, Glenorchy, to whom James Macpherson offered to show his MSS. at his house, Putney Heath, London.  
 Rev. James Nicolson, Portree, Skye.  
 Rev. Charles Smith, native of Mull.  
 Rev. Dr. Fraser, Inveraray.  
 Rev. Alex. Fraser; Rev. Mr MacGillivray.  
 Rev. Mr MacLaurin, Cowal; Rev. Jas. Calder.  
 Rev. Messrs Stewart, translators of the Bible; and many others.

Amongst the laymen were:—

Sir John Sinclair, Caithness (non Gaelic).  
 Sir James Foulis, Colinton, Gaelic scholar.  
 Lachlan Macpherson, Strathmashie, scholar and poet; Sir George MacKenzie of Coull.  
 General MacKay, of Big House.  
 Archibald Fletcher, Glenorchy collector and reciter; the Fletchers, Glenforsa, Mull.  
 Captain John MacDonald, Breakish, Skye (collector and reciter).  
 Sir James MacDonald of Sleat.  
 The Clanronald; Hugh MacLeod, Barra.  
 MacLeod of MacLeod, Dunvegan, Skye.  
 Lachlan MacVurich, bard and reciter.  
 Lieut. Duncan MacNicol, 88th Regiment.  
 Hugh MacDonald, Kelpeder, South Uist.  
 Captain Morrison, Skinnidin, Skye.  
 Ewan Macpherson, Badenoch (collector of MS.); Donald Martin, Skye.  
 Major Alex. MacDonald, Vallay, North Uist.  
 Roderick MacNeill, younger of St. Kilda.  
 Captain Ewan MacDonald, Griminish, North Uist; MacLeod of Talisker, Skye.  
 Alex. and Malcolm Macpherson, Portree, Skye; Neil MacKinnon, reciter.  
 Donald Kennedy (collector of poems).  
 Mrs Grant of Laggan, authoress of "Letters from the Hills"; Alex. Grant, Dalrachny.  
 Hugh Campbell, translator of Ossian.  
 Captain Ranald MacDonald, Keppoch.  
 Sir John Macpherson, Lauriston, Edinburgh.  
 Mr Campbell, brother to Dunstaffnage.  
 Mr Nicolson, Scurrybreck, Skye.

Peter Macfarlane, scholar and translator.  
 John MacKenzie, Temple, London.  
 Alex. MacNab, blacksmith, Dalmally.  
 Archibald Menzies, J.P., Edinburgh.  
 Henry MacKenzie, London; Neil MacVurich.  
 Dr. Donald Smith, surgeon, Breadalbane Fencibles; Major MacLachlan, Kilbride.  
 Sir Duncan Campbell, Glenorchay.  
 Donald Campbell of Airds, Argyllshire.  
 Æneas MacIntosh of MacIntosh.  
 James Grant, Rothiemurchus.  
 Mrs Fraser, Culbokie, Gaelic scholar and collector; Sir James Murray MacGregor.  
 Lord Lyndoch; MacLean of Coll.  
 Lord Kames, author of "Sketches of the History of Man," and works on morality and religion; and Lord Bannatyne, both non-Gaelic, but strong supporters of Ossian.  
 Alex. MacMillan, deputy keeper of H.M. Signet; Mr John Clark, Badenoch.  
 Alex. Fraser, Governor to Francis Stewart.  
 Lieut.-Col. Arch. MacNab of 88th Regiment.  
 Kenneth Macpherson, merchant, Stornoway; and many more.

These men could not all have been fools and liars. It is absurd nonsense to tell any sensible man that this host of highly respectable Gaelic-speaking clergymen and gentlemen and some sworn witnesses did not hear the poems they mention being recited, as some of them specially stated they were the same as those published by Macpherson.

If the adverse critics were unanimous, their statements would be more difficult to deal with; but they are not, and some of them make the most glaring contradictions. I have a melancholy satisfaction, therefore, in placing them upon the horns of the following dilemma:— If famous Gaelic scholars like the Rev. Dr. Thomas Ross, of Lochbroom; Dr. Stewart, Dingwall; and Lachlan Macpherson, Strathmashie, had been the authors of the Gaelic of "Ossian"—as the



German school asserts—they would have had the language in every respect correct so far as the grammar and diction were concerned. If, on the other hand, Macpherson's knowledge of

#### THE WRITTEN LANGUAGE

was so deficient as to altogether preclude the possibility of his being able to produce them, as alleged by his contemporaries; and if the Gaelic—according to such eminent scholars and philologists as the late Rev. Dr. Alexander Cameron, of Brodick, Dr. Clerk, of Kilmallie, Prof. Blackie, and others—was “unquestionably the original,” Macpherson could not have been the sole author of both the English and Gaelic, as some of our own scholars aver, and it is equally clear that these latter critics can't be right. So far as they are concerned, the question can never be settled. It has been said that “Fingal” was woven out of “Manus.” The converse is much more likely, viz., that “Manus” is a corruption from “Fingal,” for, barring a similarity of names, and an invasion of Ireland by the King of Denmark to take away Fingal's wife\* and his dog by force, there is no resemblance between them. “Manus” as it exists in “Leabhar na Feinne,” is a poem—if it can be called a poem at all—of irregular quatrains without a single striking passage, and manifestly very poor poetry, with a strong Irish colouring of pure romance. There is too much about Patrick and Peter in these ballads, and their whole groundwork is too outrageous to be placed alongside the real “Ossian.” If they had striking passages, their weakness could be overlooked on

account of lofty flights of imagination; but as they stand, they are such poems as almost anyone could string together.

The genius who could have produced “Fingal” and “Temora” under the age of twenty-five would neither borrow from a third-class poem like “Manus” nor stop suddenly where Macpherson did. Of course, it is rather irritating that the poems of “Ossian” are “involved” in the “obscurity” of the historians, but unfair and destructive critics have only themselves to blame for it. The gross abuse with which Macpherson was assailed hurt his proud spirit to such an extent—after leaving his originals at his publishers for upwards of a year for inspection without their having been examined by anyone—that he determined they should never again be seen by human eye, thus leaving us

#### A NUT TO CRACK

that will cause a good deal more ink to be wasted before the question is settled.

I would have rejected all the ballads exactly as Macpherson did. They are not the true type of Ossian's poems, and can't for a moment be compared with them or thrust upon them. The truth is that as the literature of the people was nearly all absorbed in Ossianic lore, there were minor poets and others in abundance who would continue reciting the poems and mixing them up with legends, while the true Ossianic poetry was preserved by the bards only, and those who had real poetical instinct.

It is probable that a gradual change was coming over the people since the Reformation, and those ballads which alluded to Christianity would be more in

\* There is fiction on the face of this *causus belli*.

favour with the Church, and the best of the heroic poetry left to the strongest intellects—and they were the minority—and the bards up to the extinction of the latter. However disappointing it may be to the educational encyclopædias and their supporters, I can promise them that the Ossianic controversy is far from being settled. In each succeeding generation for a long time to come—until passion and partisanship have subsided—men will arise who will say, “this poetry was not by James Macpherson, nor by any modern poet.” As we shall presently discuss Macpherson’s fitness for the Gaelic task—one which he never pretended to assume—having called himself the “translator” only, we may predict that it is there he will ultimately be left.

Since we have got sufficient evidence that the Gaelic of Ossian was the original language, we shall now proceed to consider the ability of James Macpherson to

#### PRODUCE THE GAELIC.

The committee of the Highland Society which investigated the matter, and were competent judges, state in their report that, “considering that he left the Highlands when young, and was busily occupied with public affairs in England and elsewhere, it was scarcely possible that he could be familiar with the Gaelic language. There are several Gaelic passages which, confessedly, he misunderstands, and these not the most obscure. He fails glaringly in the sea pieces (being an inland Highlander), sometimes making the most graphic and stirring descriptions almost meaningless in his translation.”

“I think it will be admitted,” says Dr. Clerk, “that if he could not translate these

passages accurately, he certainly could not have composed them.

“Another point, his English compositions are certainly nothing remarkable. How, then, could it be believed that while he writes thus in the language which he knew best, he would rise to true sublimity and pathos in the language which he knew least?”

Ask any poet and see what answer you will get? Notwithstanding all this, there are passages here and there utterly inconsistent with Ossian’s manner. There are lines obscure and ill-arranged that it is difficult to make any meaning out of them, and there are various blanks in the middle of lines here and there which can’t be accounted for. This can only be got over by supposing him, with his imperfect knowledge of Gaelic, to have taken what he got from ignorant transcribers† or reciters just as they gave it, and is only similar to what we meet in other ancient poets.‡

As to his having constructed his work out of the Ossianic ballads, which are so numerous in the Highlands, the history of the Homeridae, and of other imitators of great poets, leads to the presumption that the authors of the Gaelic ballads were also imitators; and if any man takes the trouble of comparing them with Macpherson’s Ossian he will not be long in doubt as to which is the original, and which the copy, which the text, and which the oft-disjointed and dreary commentary. They are frequently verbose amplifications of the concise and painted narratives of Ossian, and some show their modern origin by allusion to the Christian religion.

Those who maintain that if Macpherson did not produce the poems his namesake, Macpherson of Strathmashie a well-known

† Which, of course, exonerates Strathmashie and his assistants.

‡ Dr Clerk’s “Ossian.”

poet, did it for him. There is as much known of Strathmashie's poetry as is quite enough to dispose of this theory. He composed five or six songs, which have been printed in various collections. They show familiarity with vernacular Gaelic, and considerable facility in rhyming, but no approach to Ossian's grand and lofty style.

Strathmashie was more of a humorous and satirical poet than anything else.

The only man of that period—1760-1780—who could have been supposed capable of producing Ossianic poetry was Alexander MacDonald, "Alistair MacMhaighstir Alastair," but though his poetic powers were great, he never came in contact with James Macpherson. It cannot be too often repeated and impressed upon every rational man who understands both the Gaelic and the English languages that the Gaelic is the original and the English the translation. There is a living freshness, a richness, a minuteness of colouring and detail in the similes of the Gaelic, of which not a trace is to be found in the indefinite generalities of Macpherson's translation, and which could not by any law of thought be learned from it. It would be as possible to construct Homer from Pope's translation, as Ossian from Macpherson's, and for anyone who does not understand Gaelic pronouncing an adverse opinion on the subject is utterly unreasonable.

What would be thought of a man who dogmatised on the genuineness of the Homeric poems, who knew them only through Pope's translation, and did not understand a single syllable of Greek? Yet Pope's translation is truer to Homer than Macpherson is to Ossian.

It is quite conceivable that a Gaelic speaking man who leaves his native glen early in life, and takes to other pursuits and studies, and preserves his knowledge of Gaelic from books only, becoming a crank on this subject, because he has lost touch with the sentiments of his countrymen—if he ever knew much about them—and the smattering of Latin,

Greek, mathematics, and other subjects which he possesses, completely upset his judgment. The scientific accuracy which he expects, and has been led to expect from books, he cannot find. The angles of Cuchullin, Fingal, and St. Patrick, and the immense amount of rubbish which has grown round those prominent figures can't be reconciled by him, and he collapses, uttering all sorts of curses against Fingal and his heroes!

The calm-minded antiquarian, on the other hand, rejoices in the difficulty. It is as pleasant to him as "the joy of grief" was to Ossian! He does not expect to find

#### ABSOLUTE TRUTH

or any perfection in histories, and he just takes them for what they are worth. There is no absolute certainty that Ossian ever spoke to St. Patrick, who established Christianity in Ireland—"Padruig nan Salm" was not necessarily St. Patrick. We have as much evidence that he was one of the early Christian missionaries as that he was the patron Saint of Ireland. Neither need we believe that the said "Padruig" got screwed in Ossian's house!

The authors of most of the ballads are unknown, and it is just as well that they are, as they left nothing very great to perpetuate their memories. In the Dean of Lismore's Book about nine poems are attributed to Ossian. The apparent discrepancy between the times of Cuchullin and Fingal is not admitted by Scottish tradition. They have always been placed in the same era by the latter, and so they are in the poems of Ossian.

The Irish had no chronological history in reality prior to the 5th century.

Legends like the "Tain Bó Cuailgne" and the "Chronicle of Ireland"§ are not authentic history. Both these are not only marvellous, but absurd nonsense. A poetical genius arising from a hillside, like the Ayrshire ploughman,|| is much more probable than that Scotland is derived from "Scota," daughter of Pharaoh, King of Egypt.

The great mistake Celtic scholars commit is in forcing things into the early centuries of the Christian era that won't go into them. To hold that the present Gaelic-speaking inhabitants of the Highlands are the descendants of an Irish colony of Celts that came over to Argyllshire in the 6th century requires

#### STRONGER CONFIRMATION

than the opinion of self-constituted philologists, who wish history to agree with their theories. They forget that the original inhabitants of Britain came over from Gaul. That these spread gradually northwards into Scotland and westwards into Wales. Some adventurous parties from these parts of Wales and Scotland in sight of Ireland crossed over and settled there. Now, it is against all probability that these preliminary scouts alone carried their customs, habits, and language along with them, and preserved especially their language, and that those left behind in Cantyre and the West Highlands lost theirs, or let it become extinct, until the descendants of the first emigrants in the shape of the Dalriadic colony came over from Ireland, and established the Gaelic language in Scotland. Originally, they spoke the same

language, and it remains to be proved how the change, if any came about. The emigrants who originally crossed over to Ireland were the smaller number and left the larger number behind. There is a lot here that will test the ingenuity of the historians and fable-mongers. I may assist or perplex them by asking a simple question—What people, if any, inhabited Skye, Lewis, and Mull in the 1st century of the Christian era? No one can tell for certain.

It is presumed they were Picts. Why, then, should we be bound down to these hard and fast dogmas concerning the Dalriadic colony as being the fountain head of the Gaelic language and people of the West Highlands? I don't believe one word of it. If the islands above-mentioned were inhabited in

#### THE FIRST CENTURY

of our era, what language did they speak? Cumbro-British, or what? A mixture of Welsh and something else? My belief is that they spoke Gaelic, and nothing else. Of course, it would be a dialect somewhat different from that of the present day; but I have no doubt they used the phrase—"Ciamar tha thu 'n diugh?" how are you to-day?" pretty much as we do. We would require to go back two thousand years before the Christian era to get at the real truth.

In the year 80 A.D., or thereabouts, when Agricola advanced as far north as the Tay, the Caledonians consisted of twenty-one Gaelic clans.\* Now, what are we to understand by the phrase "Gaelic clans" here? We surely must infer from it that it was the Gaelic language they

§ Collected by Meredith Hammer, D.D. (1571).

|| Who was of Highland descent.

\* Chalmers' "Caledonia."

spoke. In 306 A.D., Constance came to Britain to repel the Caledonians and "other Picts." This is the first time the Picts appear in history, though the Caledonians had before been mentioned under other names. The year 360 A.D. is the epoch of the first appearance of the Scottish people in the pages of Roman annals. The Picts were Celts and the Caledonians were Celts, and the difficulty is in getting at the root of the business. The "History and Traditions of the Isle of Skye"† says that the early inhabitants of Scotland were probably a colony of Celts from Gaul, a few centuries before the Christian era, who, on landing in Scotland, gave it its name of "Alba" or "Albin," signifying mountainous, and who were themselves styled "Albanaich," but also retained their original name of Gaul or Gael. These spread over the Western Isles, and would in all probability be

#### THE ABORIGINAL INHABITANTS

of Skye. Towards the Christian era a colony of Goths or Scythians, from Scandinavia, appear to have invaded and settled in the Western Isles, which they called "Hebudæ," corrupted into Hebrides," in honour of their leader "Hubba." They were called Gall, or strangers, hence the Western Isles were also styled "Innse-Gall," Islands of the Strangers.

The famous Rev. Dr. John Macpherson, of Sleat, Skye, already alluded to as a powerful advocate in favour of Ossian, and an authority on Celtic matters, says:

It is impossible to prove from any faithful record that Kenneth MacAlpine introduced a new language among his new subjects after he had united the Pictish

kingdom with that of the Scots. The reply generally given to that is that certain chartularies show that the Scoto-Irish did in some respects change words in the British speech for their own. For instance, changed "aber" into "inver."‡

The evidence is neither very satisfactory nor convincing. Chalmers, in his "Caledonia," remarks thus—"Whether Caracalla, the son of Severus, ever fought with the heroes of Ossian on the river Carron, admits of a doubt similar to that regarding certain roads, whether they were made by Agricola, Severus, or Urbicus," it is demonstrable, however, that the language of the Caledonian bard was not spoken within the Caledonian region for three centuries after the campaign of Severus had ceased with fruitless efforts. We deny that in toto¶ There is no proof whatever that the Gaelic language was not spoken in the West Highlands before the 6th century. The subject is as hazy as the maker of the roads above alluded to. In MacKenzie's "History of the Outer Hebrides," he says—"We have the assertions of John of Fordun, reiterated by later Scottish historians, that the Hebrides were in the possession of the Scoto-Irish for many centuries before the Norse settlements took place."

"But," continues Chalmers—

heroic poetry requires not authentic history to support its elegant narratives, nor to justify its ingenious fictions. The language of Ossian became the vernacular dialect of North Britain at a subsequent period, and the bard may have praised the valour, or deplored the misfortunes of his countrymen

† "Aber" is a Welsh word corresponding exactly with the Gaelic "inver" and used synonymously in "cotland."

¶ See Skene's "Highlanders of Scotland."

† "History and Traditions of the Isle of Skye," 1871.



in Gaelic verses, which, as they delighted a rude people, were transmitted by tradition to their children, and the young repeated in pleasing episodes, what were thus delivered to them by the old as the oral communications of their ancestors.

Of course, if it could be proved that Ossian did not speak Gaelic in the 3rd century—there being none to speak—it would settle at once that he could not have lived at the time claimed for him. One of the reasons given that the language of the Picts

#### WAS NOT GAELIC

is suggested by the fact that St. Columba was compelled to employ the services of an interpreter when seeking to convert the ancient Pictish (?) chieftain, "Artb-ranan," in the island of Skye. Adamnan, in his life of the Saint, mentions this incident (among other improbable things, including miracles).

The argument drawn from Adamnan that the Picts and the Scots spoke different languages rests on the assertion that when Columba, who was an Irish Scot, addressed the Picts, he is described as using an interpreter. Although Columba frequently conversed with the Picts, there are but two occasions on which any such expression is used, and in both passages the expression of Adamnan is exactly the same, viz., "Verbo Dei per interpretatorem recepto," so that it was the Word of God, that is the Bible, which, being written in Latin, required an interpreter, and the very distinction which is made by Adamnan, who never uses the expression when Columba addresses the Picts, but only when he reads the Word of God to them, proves clearly that they must have understood each other without difficulty.\*

As to the difficulty of transmitting these poems from age to age, the institution of the bards is quite sufficient to account for it, as we shall presently see. It was a principle with the early Celtic people never to commit anything to writing, according to the settled maxim that it was more glorious to perform great actions than to write in good language, and the observance of this rule enabled the people to

#### DEVELOP THEIR MEMORIES

to an extraordinary extent. And what Max Muller says of the great Epic of the Finns, the "Kalewala," more than merits it. Muller, speaking of this race, of whom only about a million and a half remain in Finland, Olmetz, and Archangel, remarks:—

Their literature and, above all, their popular poetry bears witness to a high intellectual development in times which we may call mythical. The epic songs still live among the poorest, recorded by tradition alone, and preserving all the features of a perfect metre, and of a more ancient language. From the mouths of the aged an epic poem has been collected, equalling the Iliad in length and completeness and beauty!

James Macpherson collected the poems of Ossian from oral recitation and partly from MSS., the oral portion having been transferred to paper, and when these originals were lost or destroyed, all trace of their contents could not be recovered 40 years after. We know that even printed books have perished.

Professor O'Curry proves that several Irish MSS. have been lost within the last 200 years. In Germany the "Lay of the Neibelungs" had been long utterly forgotten, when in the 18th century it was

\* Skene's "Highlanders of Scotland."

for the first time printed from a MS. in the old library of a noble family.

One hundred years ago England possessed only one tattered copy of "Childe Waters" and "Sir Cauline," Spain only one tattered copy of the noble poem of the "Cid." The snuff of a candle or a mischievous dog might in a moment have deprived the world for ever of any of these fine compositions.†

Aye, or the depredations of a mouse, vide the old Gaelic MSS. in the Advocates' Library, Edinburgh.

When we consider that the archives of the poorer people in the Highlands were generally kept in the same chest with the valuables and the whisky, it is surprising that MacPherson collected so much as he did. The Finns were not subjected to half as many political and religious disturbances as the Highlanders of Scotland were.

In connection with the orthography of the Dean of Lismore's Book, the famous Dr. Ewen MacLachlan says of it:—

Our language exhibited in the ancient garb of Anglo-Monkish orthography is so disfigured and caricatured that hardly a vestige of its grammar or philosophy can be traced.

The stainless purity of Ossian's poems in comparison with the Dean's coarse pieces is in itself proof that he lived in

#### A DIFFERENT ERA

from him or Macpherson. Whatever may be the value of the Dean of Lismore's poems in a linguistic point of view, it is interesting and important as throwing clear light on some of the questions raised in the Ossianic controversy.

1st. It effectually disposes of the ignorant assertion that there is no Gaelic writing one hundred years old.

2nd. It shows that more than three hundred years ago Ossian was held to be the "King of Song," and Fingal "the hero of heroes."

3rd. It shows that several of the events mentioned by Macpherson were the subject of popular poetry at that period.

4th. In the close similarity of several ballads collected by Stone, Kennedy, and others to the versions in the Dean's Book, a very remarkable proof of the fidelity of tradition for a period of more than two centuries is afforded.

5th. It shows, also, though very inferior to other collections—such as the Rev. Dr. Smith's "Sean Dana"—that Gaelic poetry was "carefully cultivated in the Highlands for nearly four centuries."

Another important fact to remember is that "Macpherson's" Gaelic was not published until 1807, and that the men who

#### REPEATED THESE POEMS

in Inverness-shire, Argyllshire, and in Perthshire, some as early as 1763, and all before 1806, could not by any possibility have had access to it, and it will be seen that we have various pieces amounting in all to 900 lines (if we include "the fragments," to 1700 lines) of Macpherson's poetry, clearly proved to be known among Highlanders independently of him and his companions.

This fact acquires much additional weight when we observe that among the pieces thus verified are some of the minor poems, the Gaelic of which Macpherson never published. It is also of great importance to observe that among those pieces there are many of the very gems

† Lord Macaulay's preface to "Lays of Ancient Rome," 1866.

of the Ossianic poetry. The sun hymns, "Malvina's Dream," etc., were among the finest of Ossian's compositions. Two things are thus undeniable, viz., that the power of producing poetry of the highest order must be conceded to the Caledonians before the days of Macpherson; and that there are several portions of the Gaelic "Ossian" which are unquestionably genuine.†

A question frequently asked is—how could such poems be carried down through so many ages by oral tradition only? In order to answer this objection, it will be necessary to consider again the influence of the bards at greater length, and how poems were preserved in other countries.

The bardic order was a very ancient institution among the Celts. They were originally members of the priesthood and no class of society has been more celebrated. Whether we consider the influence which they possessed, their learning, or poetic genius, they are one of the most interesting orders of antiquity, and worthy of our entire admiration. It is generally believed that the Druids committed nothing to writing, and that, in fact, their profession forbade the use of letters; but while this is true as far as respects their mythology and religious rites, there is every reason to believe that they composed books or tracts on other subjects.‡

The bards, who were the professors and conservators of history, appear to have been under no restraint in committing their particular knowledge to writing, and it is reported that collections of the Brehon laws of high antiquity, and in their peculiar language, still exist. At "I," or Iona, the chief seat of the

Druidical order in Scotland, Columba is said to have burned a heap of their books, and in Ireland St. Patrick was no less severe, committing, according to the Leccan records, no less than 180 tracts to the flames. The assertion so often repeated in the Ossianic controversy that no Gaelic MSS. were in existence, was generally believed until the investigations of the Highland Society proved its falsity. The bards occasionally wrote in the

#### FIRST AGES OF CHRISTIANITY,

but we are told that they did not make it a practice to commit their poems to literary record before the 5th century, and the distractions which so long afflicted the country occasioned the loss, either by destruction or removal, of most of their productions.

A fragment of Strathclyde Gaelic which Lhuyd found, and pronounced of the sixth century, shows that the people of that district were equally educated with their neighbours. Adamnan's "Life of Columba" was first written in Gaelic, so were most of the books known to have been preserved at Iona, several of which in 1525 were removed to Aberdeen, but others were torn up for snuff paper at Inveraray.¶

The respect paid to the bards who survived the fall of Druidism continued until comparatively recent times among the Celtic inhabitants of Scotland. They are noticed as possessing a similar influence over the Irish in the 17th century, as they did over the Gauls more than 2000 years ago. Their military duties

† Dr. Clerk's Ossian.

‡ Logan's Scottish Gael, Vol. I.

¶ Dr. Watson, author of "Lives of Fletcher and Gordon," discovered at Rome a MS. of Ossian's Poems, which had been taken away after the rebellion of 1715.



were those which afterwards devolved on the heralds, but their religious character did not prevent them from taking a more active part in the conflict. The bards were certainly armed—as we find from Talliesen, who was himself of the order. Carri, a bard of Fingal's time, appears fighting; and Ullin, another, is mentioned as carrying the spear.

But they were of most service in animating the people by the "Prosnachadh 'cath," or incentive to battle, which was either hereditary or extempore, and was chanted before the commencement and in the heat of battle. Diodorus Siculus informs us that the bards had power to prevent an engagement, even when the spears were levelled for immediate action. The office was hereditary, but a

#### LONG COURSE OF STUDY

and a life of continual practice were necessary for proper qualification and due success.

The Irish bard, according to Walker, was obliged to study for twelve years before he was admitted to the order—the "Olamh"—perfecting himself by a probation of three years devoted to each of the four principal branches of poetry.

Campion says they spent 16 to 20 years at their education. An important part of the bardic duty was the preservation of genealogies and descent of the chiefs and the tribe, which were solemnly repeated at marriages, baptisms, and burials. The last purpose for which they were retained by the Highlanders was to preserve a faithful history of their respective clans.

The history of the Celts, their laws, and usages, were preserved in their poems, which were their only registers. It has been shown

that traditional verse was the only medium by which the early Greeks transmitted their most important statutes, and the memory of past transactions. The oral registers of the Germans were ancient in the days of Tacitus, and in spite of the fluctuations and reverses of that people, they were not forgotten in the 8th century. The Lusitani had poems which they maintained were two thousand years old.\*

That poems of great antiquity existed at the period when Ossian sang is evident from the frequent allusion he makes to "the songs of old," and "bards of other years." "Thou shalt endure," said the bard of ancient days, "after the moss of time shall grow in Temora; after the blast of years shall roar in Selma."

The "Albanach Duan,"† a Gaelic poem of the time of Malcolm III., 1056, which is

#### AN UNDISPUTED RELIC,

must have been composed from poems much anterior to its own age, and this is admitted by those who have been most noted for their scepticism of Celtic literature.

So powerful was the influence of the bards that Cairbre, the murderer of Cormac, who could without remorse imbrue his hands in the blood of kings and princes, shrank from shedding the blood of the bards, their confinement being all he durst venture on, even when he knew them to be inimical to his ambitious designs.

A Chairbre, fuasgail-sa na bàird,  
Is iadsan clann an àm 'chaidh sìos,  
Cluinnear an guth-sa air àrd,  
'Nuair dh' aomais gu làr ar sìol,  
Sìol rìghrean Tighmòra nan crann.

\* Logan's Scottish Gael.

† Ossian is not mentioned in it.

Cairbar, give freedom to the bards;  
 They are the children of the bygone time,  
 Their voices shall be heard on high,  
 When our race has fallen to the ground—  
 The kingly race of Temora of Woods.

said Cathmor to his brother Cairbre, who had held the bards in durance through fear of the influence they would exert on the minds of the people in causing them to revolt against his unrighteous usurpation of the throne of Cormac, the young King of Ireland. §

In fact, the bards were the teachers of morality, the inspirers of heroic virtue, and the historians of the community. From the above it will be seen that the Celtic bards were a very important class, and the function being a hereditary one, it can be readily understood how their most important poems were handed down by oral tradition, even after writing became more or less general. The seclusion of the Highlands and the habits of the people were conducive to the preservation of their poems, and the extraordinary powers of memory which they developed assisted greatly, together with the flexibility of the language in fixing the poems upon their memories. Now, if we contrast this with how poems were preserved in other countries, we shall see that the Celts

#### HAD THE ADVANTAGE

in that respect, though they have never got credit for it. It is said that the poems of Homer were preserved in detached parts called rhapsodies, long before they assumed their present form, and the Athenians found it necessary to offer rewards to those who could furnish the

most authentic fragments of the "Iliad" or "Odyssey" before they were able to produce the works as they now appear.\* Considering that they were not brought from Ionia until three hundred years after the death of Homer, and had been arranged by a hotch-potch of savants, including Lycurgus, Pisistratus, Cicero, Diogenes Laertius, Solon, Plato, Hipparchus, Zenodotus, Aristarchus, and the Alexandrian grammarians, it is strange that no one doubts their authenticity. Who can tell what additions and substractions have been made by all these hands?

The warmest defenders of Homer admit that it contains many interpolations. The late Mr Gladstone held that in the 11th Book alone there were 150 lines absolutely irrelevant, and there are numerous discrepancies far surpassing any blemish in "Ossian" between Books IV. V., VIII., and XIII. Notwithstanding all this, the Homeric poems were received by the Greeks and by the general public in every civilised country as the genuine utterance of the ancient Grecian muse. Let the same broad common sense view which pronounces this opinion in the face of many difficulties and objections be taken of Ossian's poems, and they will also be received as truly "the voice of Cona"—the genuine utterance of the ancient Celtic muse.\*

The "Edda," the mother of all Scandinavian poetry, is said to have been composed in the 6th century, carried to Iceland in the 9th, and written down in the 11th century. All this rests on the

\* Elian.

\* The Homeric Dissertations of the late Professor Blackie.

§ "The Authenticity of the Poems of Ossian," by P. MacNaughton.

authority of Bishop Brynjulf, Swendsen, who discovered the "Codex Regius" in 1643, and wrote on the copy of it with his own hand the title of "Edda Sœmundar hinns froða."

Or take the "Niebelungen Lied." Prof. Max Muller traced it back to the "Edda," and still further, to Grecian and Persian myths about

#### THE UNCEASING CONTEST

between darkness and light.† But taking it in the historical view generally given of it, it is said to refer to events of the 5th century, to have been written down in the end of the 12th century, and entirely forgotten, when a MS. of it was accidentally discovered, as already stated, in the library of a German noble in the 18th century. There is no countersigning of that MS. Yet the "Niebelungen Lied" is received as an ancient poem, and "a very noble one."

Neither are there any ancient MSS. of the works of Taliessin and other Welsh bards. Yet Welshmen maintain that the "Four Ancient Books of Wales" were composed about the 6th century, and written down in the 12th.

Add to these ancient poems handed down by oral tradition the "Kalewala" the great epic poem of the Finns—equalling the "Iliad" in length, beauty, and completeness, brought down by oral tradition from mythical times, and we have sufficient proof that if all these are authentic, there is nothing to prevent our claim for the antiquity of the poems of Ossian.

All Scotsmen don't demand a lawyer's proof of the antiquity of these poems,

but some of them reject their own as being spurious, because they are not satisfied that the language is sufficiently ancient in appearance to "dumbfounder the understanding," and being ignorant of the importance of the institution and functions of the bards in transmitting their poems from generation to generation, they follow in the wake of non-Gaelic and prejudiced writers, who seem incompetent to take a calm and impartial view of the subject. Though "the Gaelic literature of the middle ages is now accessible to all," it does not affect the

#### QUESTION OF OSSIAN'S POEMS

in the slightest degree, as most of these ancient MSS. are Irish legends built upon the current belief in the existence of some of Ossian's heroes as early as the 12th century or earlier. This subject shall be dealt with later on, and their pretentious character exposed. The "fragments" are believed by J. F. Campbell and others to be perfectly genuine; yet no one can produce originals to correspond with Macpherson's translations. Neither can anyone reproduce them nor fill up the gaps left in Macpherson's Gaelic text. It is, therefore, just as likely that he had originals for all the poems as for the "fragments."

When we recollect that James Macpherson himself volunteers the statement that he altered the "uncouth orthography" of the bards in some instances, and joined portions of "Temora" together as the poems reached him, and that the spelling was modernised considerably before the poems were published in Gaelic, the objections of the Celtic scholars on this head

† Professor Max Muller, "Chips," Vol. II.

## FALL TO THE GROUND.

The only difficulty is to reconcile the following assertion, viz., that it was—impossible Ossian could have lived in the 3rd century, because he would have had to shake hands with Cuchullin,‡ who is said by Irish chroniclers to have lived in the first century of our era, and with Saint Patrick, who lived in the 5th century, 440-460 A.D.‡ and that he could not have composed Gaelic poems in the 3rd century, because there was no Gaelic spoken in Scotland for some centuries after.

That would certainly be a poser if it were true; but did Cuchullin actually live in the 1st century? Irish tradition and Irish analysts say that he did; but Scottish tradition and Ossian's poems say that he did not, and they should be just as reliable, if not more so. As previously stated, Ireland had no chronological history in reality prior to the 5th century, so it can't be proved, and if the "Tain Bo Cuailgne" (The cattle raid of Cualgne), a MS. dating from about 1100 A.D., be regarded as evidence of Cuchullin being an Irishman, it can easily be shown that it rests on the wildest of legends. The "Tain Bo" proves one thing. It proves that a hero named Cuchullain was known in Ireland as early as the 12th century, but when it begins to describe his "boyish days" in Ireland, it launches into stories—as they are frequently mentioned—as wide as the poles from any probable truthful history. A quotation or two will be quite enough to dispel the delusion, but before doing so it may be mentioned that the "Tain Bo" also makes it clear that chariots were known as early as the 12th century.—From "Cuchulainn's Boyish Deeds."

‡ Cuthullin, Cudullin, or Cuchulainn.

§ 432, according to the "Chronicle of Ireland," 1571.

"Although we are in exile there is not in Ireland a warrior who is more wonderful," said Fergus. What does that mean? The Ulster boys

Threw three fifties of hurling clubs at him; he warded them off, so that they did not touch him, and he took a bundle of them on his back. Then contortion seized him. He shut one of his eyes, so that it was not wider than the eye of a needle. He opened the other so that it was as large as the mouth of a mead cup. He laid bare his jawbone to his ear; he opened his mouth to his jaw, so that his gullet was visible. The hero's light rose from his head. Then he strikes at the boys. He overthrows fifty of them before they reached the door of Emain."

"When the boys saw the dark, black men, they all took to flight except Cuchulainn alone. He kills 9 of them, and they leave fifty wounds on him."

"A man who did these deeds, when his five years were not full, it would be no wonder that he should have come to the edge of the boundary, and that he should have cut off the heads of yonder four. He overthrew three fifties of boys by himself, and there did not meet round him a number that could overthrow him. Chonchobar gave him a chariot. He put his hand between the 2 poles so that the chariot broke. He broke 12 chariots in this way.

He kills 30 of them on Ath Duirn; he slays a hundred men of them every night of the three nights that they were there. Ten Kings over seven fifties did Cuchulainn slay in Breslich Mór in Mag-Murthemne, and an innumerable number besides of dogs and horses, and women and boys, and people of no consequence, and rabble. For there did not escape one man out of the three of the men of Ireland without a thigh-bone, or half his head, or one eye broken, or without being marked for ever!

Nonsense of this kind leaves anything approaching authentic history far behind.

As to whether Gaelic was spoken in Scotland in the 3rd century or not, there is no subject in all that relates to Ossian

to which the historians and Celtic scholars held to "like grim death," than that there was not, nor for several centuries after. So deeply rooted indeed had

#### THIS STUMBLING BLOCK

become that anyone doubting it would be scouted as an ignoramus, and the superior air of authority with which Ireland was spoken of as "the motherland" of the Gael and his language, can be gathered from the following passage from a lecture delivered by the late Professor O'Growney in Glasgow, in January, 1894:—

At the end of the 5th century those descendants of Cairbre Riada who had remained in Ireland sent a great swarm of Irish Gaels to Scotland under the three brothers, Lorne, Angus, and Fergus, etc. Thus the Gaelic, or Scotio people were introduced into Scotland.

While musing over these dogmatic statements by an old scholar, the present writer stumbled upon "Keltic Researches," by Ed. W. B. Nicolson, of the Bodleian Library, at Oxford, and a passage from it may act as a counterblast to the professor's statement, and may open the eyes of the dogmatic. Mr Nicolson's work, which seems an exceedingly able and scholarly one, goes thoroughly into the Pictish questions and ogam inscriptions with results unfavourable to previously held notions. In his preface, he says:—

The main historical result of this book is the settlement of the Pictish question, or rather, of the two Pictish questions. The first of these is—"What kind of language did the Picts speak?" The second is—"Were the Picts conquered by the Scots?" The first has been settled by linguistic and palaeographical methods only; it has been shown that Pictish was a language virtually identical with Irish,

differing from that far less than the dialects of some English counties differ from each other. The second has been settled with very little help from language, by historical and textual methods; it has been made abundantly clear, I think, to any person of impartial and critical mind that the supposed conquest of the Picts by the Scots is an absurd myth.

The Highlander, as we call him—the Albanach, as he calls himself in his own Gaelic—is indeed in the vast majority of cases, simply the modern Pict, and his language modern Pictish. To suppose that the great free people from which he is descended were ever conquered by a body of Irish colonists, and that the language he speaks is merely an Irish colonial dialect, are delusions which, I hope, no one will regret to see finally dispelled.

This not only proves that Pictish or Gaelic was spoken in the 3rd century, but throws Professor O'Growney and all the Celtic scholars completely overboard, and leaves Ossian triumphant singing the battle of the "Carron" against Caracalla, the son of the Emperor Severus, in 211 A.D.\*

The above removes one of the greatest obstacles to Ossian being the author of these poems since the days of Malcolm Laing and Dr. Johnson.

By a similar process of reasoning, the mythological and Cuchullin cycles, and the Red Branch or heroic romances, may yet be

#### REDUCED TO ASHES,

as these are based upon very dubious evidence of a legendary nature. Of course tradition would have handed down the recollection of Fingal's wars in Ireland, and the names of his heroes and intercommunication between the two countries having been pretty frequent in

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\* Ossian was not born at the time of Fingal's battle on the Carron, but his narrative has withstood the severest tests.



early times, the legendary stories of both countries might claim the same heroes. Even Irishmen admit that Scotland was known to prehistoric Ireland as the school of poetry and learning.†

But what are we to think of the historians and Celtic scholars who have been misleading us so long? They were all agreed as to the influence of the said Irish colony, and they were all wrong! In another century people may view the Ossianic question with more justice and greater impartiality; but the time has hardly come yet. There is such a deep-rooted prejudice against them, even at the present day, that, as in religion and politics, passion can be roused to an alarming extent over them, and each person pretending to any degree of Celtic scholarship feels that doubts would be fatal to his ambition of being ranked as an authority on the subject.

It may now be considered what did Macpherson do which he wished to conceal? We have already pretty clearly proved that he was not the author of the Gaelic of these poems, and that it is absolutely certain he did collect many Gaelic poems in the Highlands of Scotland, both in MSS. and from oral tradition, but what the length of these separate poems was will never be known. The longest may have been the four separate books of "Fingal," which he got in Skye, but that he had

#### A MASS OF MATTER

which we have not got is beyond question.

The supporters of Ossian are quite prepared to admit that he joined some of the poems together to make long epics

of them; but to what extent interpolations were introduced it is impossible to say. There are some abrupt and obscure passages, but that does not warrant the conclusion that he made any considerable additions.

Capt. Morrison's evidence is very clear on that point. He says that the poem of "Address to the Sun" in the poem of "Carthon" wanted two lines in the original, which neither Macpherson nor anybody else could supply, which supports the opinion that he made few or no additions of his own. One of the strongest facts in favour of his having collected many poems is that he went to work at his translations quite openly, and with the assistance of others, especially that of Captain Morrison, Macpherson of Strathmashie, and Rev. Mr Gallie, all of whom declared that they had actually seen many MSS. in his possession, and assisted him, and had some difficulty in understanding and deciphering the ancient Gaelic character. That alone is quite enough to account for the obscure passages. Having once joined some of the poems together, if he actually did so, he would in a manner have been giving his case away if he admitted it, and fearing, no doubt, the wretched and implacable critics who were on his track, he would naturally have considered silence the more prudent attitude to adopt.

In this there would have been no dishonesty; for if he did connect some of them together, he did so innocently, because he knew that the general public would be better able to follow the spirit of the poems in a connected form, especially those that alluded to the same subject. This is the most that Macpher-

† The Book of Leinster before 1169 A.D.



son could have done; but it is a pity he even did that, for the poems would have been more interesting had they been given just as they stood in the original "bedaubed with Scots snuff,"† as some of them were.

We shall soon get a little more into direct grips with the opposition by citing the poetry itself as a witness against the most recent writer on the subject, who declares it to be "modern"; and even as such, "rubbish"; and to repel many other trivial objections. It is rather sad to think that for more than 140 years the partisans on either side have fought each other over the Ossianic question with great determination and bitterness, giving no quarter, nor requiring any. In Fitz James and Rhoderick Dhu fashion—

Then each at once his falchion drew,  
Each on the ground his scabbard threw,  
Each looked to sun, and stream, and plain,  
As what they ne'er might see again;  
Then foot and point and eye opposed,  
In dubious strife they darkly closed.

Ignorance on the part of the non-Gaelic disputant, tinged with insolence, was mainly the cause of strife, for in reality there was no attempt on the part of the Saxon to view the subject impartially, so that helped to keep the blood boiling in the Highland camp.

One who has not read the literature of the subject can hardly believe the

#### AMOUNT OF ANIMOSITY

that was roused during the latter half of the 18th century, and ever since, up to the present day. Malcolm Laing alone wrote an elaborate essay on the subject of Ossian's poems. He went

† See Professor Adam Ferguson's evidence in the Highland Society's committee report.

over every line with marvellous minuteness, and consulted scores of works, sacred and profane, ancient and modern, for the purpose of proving the translation to have been stolen from a hundred various sources which Macpherson had probably never read, and not one of the instances of plagiarism which he adduced agrees either with Macpherson's translation or the original Gaelic.

According to Dr. Clerk, the history of the Gaelic which we have actually got is as follows:—

The proposal of publishing the Gaelic by subscription having failed, Macpherson withdrew from the controversy in sullen silence. After some time his friends urged him to the publication. He pleaded the great expense as an insurmountable obstacle in the way, whereupon Sir James Murray MacGregor and other Highland gentlemen then in the East India Company's service, subscribed and sent to him £1000 for the purpose. He now alleged want of leisure for the task, and allowed year after year to pass without doing what he had promised. He did not, however, wholly neglect the work. He sent to John MacKenzie, Esq., of the Temple, London (left as an executor under his will), the Gaelic poems which we now possess, and left the £1000 for publishing them. These Gaelic poems were all written either in his own hand or in those of amanuenses employed by him. No one can tell how the MSS. which had been collected in the Highlands were disposed of, but not a leaf of them was left behind, or any explanation given of their fate.

Mr MacKenzie delayed the publication from day to day, and finally handed over the MSS. to the Highland Society of London, who showed a noble liberality in making the fullest enquiry regarding the poems and in publishing them in a very handsome form. The editing of the Gaelic was committed to the Rev. Thos.

Ross, subsequently known as Dr. Ross, minister of Lochbroom, the correcting of the press being entrusted to the Rev. Dr. Stewart, of Dingwall, both men of talent and scholarship. The Society ordered them to conform the orthography of the text to that of the Gaelic Scriptures, an unfortunate injunction in many ways; for it would be interesting, and might be instructive to see the Gaelic which Macpherson himself wrote down; and the 1801 edition of the Gaelic Scriptures, the model proposed, is an extremely faulty one. Founded to some extent on Bishop Bedell's Irish version, it retains many phrases and spellings which never belonged to Scottish Gaelic.

Dr. Ross did not obey the injunctions. He did better; still there is a great deal of looseness in his edition. His Gaelic, however, is all that we have of

#### THE ORIGINAL "OSSIAN,"

for with the fatality which has attended all dealings with these poems, even Macpherson's Gaelic MS. has disappeared. It was at one time in the Advocates' Library, but every trace of it has been lost.

Besides the Gaelic poems left by Macpherson, and published by the Highland Society, he published short poems bearing the following titles:—"The Battle of Lora," "Darthula," "The War of Caros," "The War of Innisthona," "The Death of Cuthullin," "The Songs of Selma," "Lathmon," "Oithona," and "Berathon," along with "Fingal," "Cathlin of Clutha," and "Sulmallu of Lunnou," along with "Temora"—all bearing, like the others, to be translations from Gaelic. These are equal in

strength and beauty to the rest of the collection, and several of them were recited by various persons throughout the Highlands. But as Macpherson never published them in Gaelic, the proof of their genuineness is beyond contradiction.

One of the most remarkable things about these poems is that there is no allusion whatever to the voice of singing birds with which the woods of the Highlands must have been tuneful in the days of old as they are now. There is mention made of the "hum of the mountain bee," and "droning dance of the evening fly." In the 7th Duan of "Temora," the birds of night are startled by the loud sound of Fingal's shield, and the flight of sea-birds; but no reference is ever made to lark or thrush or blackbird—to any bird of song. The eagle (the true bird—according to its Gaelic name, *fir-eun*) is the only bird ever specially named. Of this omission

#### NO EXPLANATION

can be given. Of all the dwellers in the waters, the whale alone is mentioned, whereas modern Gaelic poetry abounds with descriptions of thrush and lark, game and the salmon, "the monarch of the flood." In Dr. Smith's "Sean Dàna," there are frequent allusions to animals and birds. If any man were able to form a true, just, and candid opinion of the poems of Ossian, that man was the late Rev. Dr. Clerk, of Kilmallie, a true Highlander born and bred, who did not require to go out of his own country for information, a man who knew the Gaelic language thoroughly, lived among the people, talked with

them daily in their own language, and preached to them in the same, while admitting that in some places the poems are obscure, and the text in other places corrupt, much of which he attributed to imperfect recording, remarks—

Much has been said of the sublimity of the Ossianic poems, and they are deserving of it all; but they contain singularly faithful and beautiful descriptions of Nature in her calm and more genial moods, which are sometimes used to illustrate the bright and gentle side of human character. These have not been sufficiently appreciated.

We shall put them to the test by calling some of the passages as witnesses—from Dr. Clerk's "Ossian." In Duan III. of "Fingal," p. 460, volume I, Cuchullin praises the song of Carul, and says:—

'S taitneach sgeul air àm a dh' fhalbh,  
Caoin mar bhalbh-dhrùchd madainn shèimh  
Air dosan 'us tuim nan ruadhag.  
'N nair a dh' ereas a' ghrian gu mall  
Air slios sàmbach nan liath-bheann,  
Loch gun bhruaillein fada thall  
Caoin 'us gorm air urlar ghleann.

Literal translations throughout:—

Pleasing the tale of the time which has gone,  
Soothing as noiseless dew of morning mild,  
On the brake and knoll of roes  
When slowly rises the sun  
On the silent flank of hoary bens —  
The loch, unruffled, far away,  
Calm and blue on the floor of glens.

In the above passage:—

The loch, unruffled, far away,  
Calm and blue on the floor of glens,"

is immensely inferior to the Gaelic original of—

Loch gun bhruaillein fada thall  
Caoin 'us gorm air urlar ghleann,

as anyone who understands Gaelic will at once perceive.

At line 14 of the same Duan, Carul tells of Fingal's youthful exploits as follows:—

'Fhionnghail, fhuir-comhnuidh 's a' chòmhrag,"  
Thuit Carull, bu bhinne fonn,  
'S lionor do cheas agus dubh-bhuill;  
Fo d' fheirg thuit Lochlin nan long,  
'N uair bha d' aghaidh cho lom ri òigh."

James Macpherson translated the first line as "Fingal! thou dweller of battle," etc., which drove Dr. Stern, of Berlin, wild, and he asks indignantly what it means. The real translation is:—

"Fingal, who in battle hast thy home,"  
Said Carul, of sweetest voice,  
"Many are thy feats and deadly strokes  
Beneath thine ire fell Lochlin of ships,  
When thy face was smooth as a maiden."

The last line Macpherson translated as "When thy youth strove with the beauty of maids." This is one of the many instances of where ignorance on the part of non-Gaelic readers does a gross injustice to the poems of Ossian. But to proceed with the finer passages. In the 1st Duan of "Temora," p. 210, the youthful prince of Ullin is beautifully described:—

Sheas Cormac 'n am meadhon cho àillidh  
Ri qg-reull ag éirigh 's an speur  
'N uair sheallus i 'an sòlas ciuin  
O chùl nan sliabh mùgach 's an ear,  
A h-àr dhealra a' glanadh o dhrùchd  
Gun smuir a' siubhal o lear;  
Gluaisidh a h-astar sambach suas

Gun nial a' ceileadh fo ghruaim a leis.

Translation:—

Stood Cormac in the midst as bright  
As a young star, when rising in the sky,  
It looks in gentle gladness  
From the back of misty mountains in the east,  
Its fresh brightness shining through the dew  
That travels in pureness from ocean; \*

\*Ossian evidently thought that dew came off the sea.

In silence moves its path on high  
Without a cloud in frown to dim its light.

Then, again, Fingal's joy in beholding  
the bravery of his young son, Fillan,  
Duan III. of "Temora," p. 308, volume  
II., is thus spoken of—

Tha sòlas, mar aiteal o ghleann,  
A' tigh 'n a nall mu ghruidh an rìgh;  
Tha 'chuidhne mu chòmhrag o shean,  
Mu làithean beama treun a shinns're  
'S e 'faicinn a mhic fo chliù  
Mar shòlas a ghrein gun nial,  
'S i coimhead sìos air cruaidh a ghluais  
Fo 'dearrsa suas air gruidh nan sliabh  
'S i 'crathadh 'n a h-aonar a ceann  
O thaobh nan gleann; mar sin bha 'n rìgh  
Fo shòlas mu Fhillean a mhac.

Translation:—

Joy, like a gentle breeze from the glen,  
Comes on the countenance of the King;  
His memory is on the wars of old,  
On the days of the mighty blows of his sires,  
While he sees his son in renown;  
Like the joy of the cloudless sun,  
When he looks on a tree which grew  
Beneath his light on the brow of the hill,  
As alone it waves its head  
On the side of the glen; so was the King  
In joy for Fillan, his son.

The description of Ossian's gladness in  
listening to "sweet voices from the  
march of the bards" is thus narrated,  
Vol. II., p. 323:—

Mar sin féin a chluinneas a' chraobh  
An gleannau cumbann lam faoin bheann  
Guth an earraich ag iadhadh m' a taobh,  
A duille a' taomadh m' a ceann.  
'S a' fosgladh fo ghathan na gréine;  
Crathaidh a geugan 's i 'n a h-aonar,  
Toirm scillein an aonaich mu'n cuairt,  
Chi sealgair le sòlas a h-aomadh,  
O sheargadh 's o mbaoile nan cruach.

Even so heareth a tree  
In the narrow gorge of desert bens  
The voice of spring approach its side;  
Its foliage springs around its head,

And opens to the shining of the sun;  
It shakes its branches all alone—  
The hum of the mountain bee is nigh;  
The hunter, with joy, beholds it wave  
Amid the blight and baldness of the crags.

An evening scene at Dora, Duan I. of  
the much-abused "Temora," p. 208, Vol.  
II., is also singularly beautiful:—

Grian bhuidhe a' plaosgadh mu Dhòra  
An liath-fheasgar a' toiseachadh thall  
Chrith coille mu'n cuairt do Tighmòra  
Fo ghaoith 'bha 'caoblachd mu chàrn:  
Thionail niula dubh, fuar 's au iar,  
Us dearg reul' fo 'n sgiathan ag éirigh:  
Sheas mi 'm aonar air aomadh nan sliabh  
Faicinn tanna's air ciar nan speur.

The yellow sun shone dim on Dora,  
Grey eve began to descend,  
Trembled the wood around Temora,  
Under the fitful wind of the cairn;  
Clouds cold and black thronged in the west,  
And red stars rose beneath their wings;  
Alone I stood on the slope of the hills,  
Beholding a ghost on the dusk of the sky.

In the first Duan of "Temora," Vol  
II., p. 170, there is a very striking con-  
trast between the peacefulness of outward  
nature and the turmoil of a guilty mind.  
It opens with a description of a bright  
and peaceful scene in Erin, in the midst  
of which stood Cairbar, restless and  
troubled as the image of the murdered  
Cormac rose before his mind:—

Gorm thonna na h-Eirinn 'an soillse  
Ard mhonadh fo bhoillsge an là,  
Cranna ciar-cheann ag aomadh fo ghaoith,  
Liath shruithean 'taomadh o charn;

Dà thom an uaine fo dharaig  
Ag iadhadh 's a' tarruing mu chaol-rath,  
Caoin shiubhal an uisge tro ghleannaibh  
Air bruaich an uilld an Cairbre féin,  
A shleagh fo chomas an trein r'a thaobh,  
A dhearg shùil fo ghiorrag 's e bròn.  
Dh' éirich Cormac 'an anam an rìgh,  
'S a lotan gun chli 'n a thaobh,  
Leth-fhaicte bha 'n t-òg an dùbhra,

'Fluìl chraobh-dhearg a' sruthadh o chliabh,  
 Thilg Cairbre a shleagh trì chuairt  
 Trì chuairt chuir e 'n fheusaig fo làimh,  
 Chas e gu tric o àrd cheum.  
 Chrath e ruigh nam beud gu h-àrd,  
 Mar nial 'am fàsach am mòr thriath,  
 Caochladh fo ghaoith nan sean a dhealbh,  
 Na gleannan am bròn fo'n fhìreach,  
 Mu seach fo ghiorrach nam braon.

The blue waves of Erin are gleaming,  
 The lofty hills in the brightness of day,  
 Dark-crested trees bend in the wind,  
 Hoary streams pour down from cairns;  
 Two green hillocks clothed in oak,  
 Stretch curving round a narrow plain,  
 Water wanders slowly through the glen;  
 By the river side was Cairbar,  
 His spear firm grasped by the side of the  
 hero,

His red eye was troubled and in grief,  
 In the soul of the king rose Cormac,  
 And the deadly wounds in his side,  
 Half seen in dimness was the youth,  
 His bubbling blood red-gushing from his  
 breast,

Three times Cairbar flung his spear,  
 Three times grasped his beard in his hand,  
 Often he stayed his hurried step,  
 And tossed on high his deadly arm.  
 The mighty chief was like a cloud of the  
 desert.

Changing its form under stormy wind;  
 While the glens by the mountain are sad,  
 As, by turns, they dread the coming showers.

"Scenes of touching pathos in describing the softer emotions of the heart, presenting tenderness beyond all tenderness," will be found in many passages of "Ossian," which completely belie the charges of exaggeration and bombast which have been brought against them. However applicable these may be to Macpherson's translations—and even they have been unfairly dealt with—they do not lie against the original. Ossian's words do not overbalance his ideas. Those people who talk most about the

poems of Ossian being turgid and absurd nonsense, are often men who cannot read a word of Gaelic, and are altogether devoid of poetic inspiration. "Ossian may not have the wonderfully vivid and varied descriptive power of Homer, but he has much more of it than Virgil; and his heroes have more distinctive characteristics than the latter. Fingal, one of the noblest and best heroes described either in ancient or modern poetry, is not merely the resistless warrior or the great king. To the very close of his life he manifests an unchanging affection for Aganideca, his first love, a never-failing interest in the friends of his youth, a lively sympathy with the young, and a freshness of love for his sons, which are intensely human and attractive."

In lamenting the fall of Ryno, "Fingal," Duan V., p. 66, Vol. II., he says:—

Slàn leat, a chend fhir 's an raon,  
 Cha chum mi o chlaon do ghat,  
 Thusa b'aille meas nan laoch,  
 Cha 'n fhaic mi thu chaoidh—slàn leat!

Farewell, thou foremost on the field!  
 No more shall I keep your arrow from  
 straying;

Thou who wast fairest of the heroes,  
 I shall see thee no more—farewell!

Or, when calling his sons to the chase, "Fingal," Duan VI., p. 120, the familiar name of the dead comes as usual to his lips; he exclaims—

Fheillein, a Ròinne—tha 's an uaigh,  
 Tha mo mhac 'an suain a' bhàis!

Fillan, Ryno—he is in the grave,  
 My son is in the sleep of death!

All throughout the poems, even the fiercest of his warriors occasionally show a touch of nature, which prevents us

from abhorring them. Starno, savage as he was, "trembled at the slaying of his son." Cairbar, the murderer of Cormac, always cherished love and fidelity to his noble brother Cathmor. And Folda, whose joy in death was the prospect of often descending from his cloud to view the graves of those he had slain, yet preserves in his heart one green spot in which dwelt the image of his only daughter Lena (Duan V., p. 299-400, Vol. II.):

Dh' isè bha 'n dearrsa bu chòrr  
O 'anam 'an uair bu mhòr stoirm.

On her shone calmest light  
From his soul at the height of the storm.

So of his female characters—"all of them in purity, dignity, and tenderness, immeasurably superior to the coarse, scolding, fighting goddesses of Homer." Many of them die in despair over their lovers' graves; but we see Oi-nam-mor-hul happily united to Tormod of the waves through the generosity of Ossian, as Uha is to Frohul (in Carric Thura) by the kindness of Fingal. Golnandona secures Toscar by following him to the chase. The fate of Morna ("Fingal," Duan I.) is tragical enough to excite the deepest interest. Sulvalla (in "Temora"), the most queenly of them all, closes her career in sadness, but the poet, with great art, throws a veil over it ("Temora," Duan VIII., p. 524):—

Na biodh cuimhn' air a bròn gu 'thrian,  
Chaitheas anam na h-aoise gu bàrr.

Let there be no remembrance of her grief,  
It sorely wastes the soul of age.

With all his pure and noble chivalry towards women, he did not believe in their absolute perfection; he presents to us in

Deil-gel\* a thorough specimen of female perfidy and heartlessness — "Fingal," Duan II., p. 445, etc. The description of Strinandona, "Ca-Lodin," Duan II., p. 46, is very beautiful:—

Bu ghile na 'n canach a cruth  
Mà 's ann air tràigh nan stuadh faoin  
Na 'n cobhar air aomadh nan sruth,  
Bha 'suilean soluis mar dhà reul;  
Mar bhogha nan speur 'am braon  
A gnùis àluinn fo 'ciabh féin.  
'S diubhè na nial fo ghaoith;  
Bu tuinidh dhuit anam nan laoch,  
A Stri-nan-daoine' bu chaoine làmh.  
Whiter than Cana was her form,  
If on the shore of restless waves,  
Than foam on the curling flood;  
Her eyes of light were like two stars;  
Like bow of Heaven in mild shower  
Was her face of beauty, under locks  
Blacker than cloud in storm;  
Thy dwelling was the soul of heroes,  
Stri-nan-don't of smoothest hand.

And of Aganideca ("Fingal," Duan III., p. 466):—

Thàinig 'n a h-aille do 'n còir,  
Mar ghealach òg o neoil air sàil  
Bha sgeimh mar sholus 'g a h-eideadh,  
Bha 'Ceuman mar cheòl nan dàn.  
Chunnaic i 'n rìgh, 'n òigh 'bu bheusach;  
Dh' èirich osna a cleibh gu mall;  
Bha 'g orm-shuil ag iadh os ìosal  
Mu thriath Mòrbheinn nan liath dhàrn.  
She came forth from her retired abode,  
And in her loveliness drow near them,  
Like a new moon from clouds on sea,  
Beauty enrobed her in light;  
Her steps were as the music of songs,  
The modest maid beheld the King;  
Slowly rose the sigh of her breast;  
Her blue eye in secret turned  
To the King of great hills of hoary cairns.  
Golnandona, at the beginning of the

\* Ded Gel, "Deud Gheal," white teeth, wife of Cairbar, who forsook him for Ferde, whose death she caused shortly after.

† Stri-nan-duoine, "strife of men."



poem bearing her name, is also very fine, and the following lines, too, regarding Roscrana ("Temora," Duan IV., line 87).

Chunnaic mi a gorm-shùil mhall  
Mar ghlan thaibhs' 'an iomairt a' triall,  
Leith-cheilte 'an cearb nan dubh nial.

I saw her mild blue eye  
Move like a pure and playful spirit,  
Half hidden in fringe of dark clouds.

The above few quotations are quite enough to prove that Ossian's poems are not "rubbish," and those who say that they are are destitute of poetic souls, and have no regard for well attested truths and facts. When men like Burns, Byron, Napoleon Bonaparte, Goethe, Schiller, Caesarotti, Lamartine, Chateaubriand, and many others admired them intensely, it is impossible that they can be devoid of poetic merit.

The truly sublime is the grand characteristic of Ossian, and is often of a peculiar kind, arising from his blending the material and the spirit worlds in a manner entirely his own, not employed by any other poet. He rarely, if ever, separates them completely. He does not, like Milton, ascend to the pure empyrean, or, like Dante, descend to an inferno. He has created a dim borderland visited by the inhabitants of both worlds, who meet and hold converse, if with some reserve and awe, yet without any of the dread and even horror with which poets generally invest the presence of dwellers in the invisible world. His heroes are on every occasion of danger or difficulty surrounded by spirits, for the "stars are seen through their forms," but they take a deep and kindly interest in all that pertains to their friends on earth. "They shine on the wind when glory wakes their

sons, and they sorrow deeply when these suffer, they warn them of impending danger, and sooth them to sleep amid anxiety. They are more etherealised human beings than thoroughly disembodied spirits, and the descriptions of their constant presence produces a feeling of eeriness such as is not produced by any other poetry—but eeriness entirely distinct from dread or horror." †

Poets are gifted with an insight into each other's ideas and sentiments and powers of description far beyond that of ordinary mortals, and can easily detect blemishes and forced imagery which is not under the direction of true genius. Burns was passionately fond of Ossian's poems, and wrote from the east coast, after returning from his Highland tour—"Warm as I am from the country of Ossian, where I have seen his very grave, what care I for fishing town or fertile carse?" He would not have said that about them if he did not think they were beautiful. Similarly Byron says:—"There is no hero in the Iliad or Odyssey who is at once so brave and so amiable as the King of Morven, the splendour of his fame being untarnished by one mean or inhuman act. He is equally the object of our admiration, esteem, and love. In sublimity of sentiment and vivacity of description, Ossian may claim a full equality of merit with Homer," and as he published an imitation of Ossian in "Hours of Idleness," it must have been from admiration of the poems.

Thomas Gray, of Cambridge, the author of the famous "Elegy written in

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† Dr. Clerk's Ossian.

a country churchyard," on receiving a copy of Macpherson's "Fragments," wrote—"I was so struck, so extassie with their infinite beauty that I writ into Scotland to make a thousand enquiries. The whole external evidence would make one believe these fragments (for so he calls them, though nothing can be more entire) counterfeit; but the internal is so strong, on the other side, that I am resolved to believe them genuine, spite of the Devil and the Kirk. It is impossible to convince me that they were invented by the same man that writes me these letters. In short, this man is the very Dæmon of poetry, or has he lighted on a treasure hid for ages."§ The poet Voss exclaimed—"What is the use of beauty in Nature? The Scotsman, Ossian, is a greater poet than the Ionian Homer." Klopstock said—"Oblivion has long covered Ossian, but now he had been brought to light, rivalled the Grecian and defied him." Lamartine placed the bard above Homer, and on a level with Dante.

In his "Memoirs of My Youth," the following brilliant passage occurs on procuring a copy of Ossian:—"I plunged into this ocean of shadow, of blood, of tears, of phantoms, of foam, of snow, of fogs, of hoar frosts, and of images, the immensity, the dimness, and the melancholy of which harmonise so well with the lofty sadness of a heart of sixteen which expands to the first rays of the infinite. Ossian has localities, and his localities and his images harmonised wonderfully also with the nature of the mountain district, almost Scottish in its

character, with the season of the year, and with the melancholy aspect of the places where I read him. It was during the biting blasts of November and December. The earth was covered with a mantle of snow, pierced here and there by the black trunks of scattered pines, or overhung by the naked and branching arms of the oaks, upon which flights of cranes assembled, filling the air with their coarse cawings. Icy fogs clothed the branches with hoar frost, clouds swept in edifying wreaths around the buried peaks of the mountains. A few streams of sunshine streamed for a moment through their openings, and discovered distant perspective of unfathomable valleys, which the eye might fancy gulfs of the sea.

"It was the natural and sublime exposition of the poems of Ossian which I held in my hand. I carried him in my hunting pouch over the mountains, and while the dogs made the deep gorges of the hills echo with their barking, I read his pages sitting beneath the shelter of some overhanging rock, only raising my eyes from its pages to find again floating along the horizon, or outstretched at my feet, the same mists, the same clouds, the same plains of ice or snow which I had just beheld in imagination. How often have I felt my tears congealing on the borders of my eye-lids! I had become one of the sons of the bard, one of the heroic, amorous, or plaintive shades who fought, who loved, who wept, or who swept the fingers across the harp in the gloomy domains of Fingal."||

In Italy the influence of Ossian was supreme. Cesarotti tells us that he be-

§ Letter to Thomas Wharton, July, 1760.

|| "The Literature of the Highlands," MacNeill, 1892.

came the founder of a school of poetry there. Throughout the literary world the power of Ossian's muse was felt. The artificiality, hollowness, and conventionality of the last quarter of the 18th century rendered the national echoes of the grand old "Voice of Cona" a fresh music and a welcome relief. Goethe, who admired them intensely, and introduced the songs of Selma into his "Sorrows of Werther," and "made them the companion of its hero," in whose affection they supplanted Homer, and mentioned him along with Shakespeare. From his father's house at Frankfort, he wrote to Herder, who had brought them to his notice, that he was now preaching them earnestly among his friends.

"O foolish Gaelatians," who hath bewitched you to despise the poetry of your own country, and could see no beauty in it, even after German, French, and Italian poets had proclaimed their superiority over all other poets to the world!

Before many years had passed, they were translated into German, Italian, Spanish, French, Dutch, Danish, Swedish, Polish, and Russian, and even in modern Greek.\* No English author before Macpherson, not even Shakespeare, Milton, Addison, or Pope, had found such a host of foreign admirers; no one after him, except Byron, hardly even Sir Walter Scott and Dickens, has had a greater fame.

To this day the belief that Ossian is one of the glories of English literature, a burning planet in our sky, lingers over the Continent. But its influence was

greatest in Germany, where the younger school of poets, having thrown off the classical tradition, lacked something to replace the classical models. Ossian came to them as dew upon the earth.†

Sir Walter Scott, in particular, has been pointed out as having followed Ossian in the extreme localization given by him on his beautiful poem, "The Lady of the Lake."‡ One of the greatest admirers of Ossian was Napoleon Bonaparte, and it has been said that he carried his admiration of them so far as to make the military tactics of Fingal (the leading hero of the poems) the model of his own generalship.

Sismondi, in his "Literature of Southern Europe," when treating of the writings of Cesarotti, the translator of "Ossian" into Italian, says that—

He was deeply penetrated with the spirit of the ancient Caledonian, much of whose dim and gigantic grandeur he has preserved in his translation.§

Among a host of other admirers on the Continent were, besides Goethe, Herder, and Klopstock—Schiller, Lessing, Novalis, Burger, and Tieck. Fragments of the poems have been set to music by Schubert and Brahms. Madame de Staël was one of the first and greatest enthusiasts. Chateaubriand was so devoted to Ossian that he would, he tells us, have sustained his existence against all men, lance in hand. "The harp of Morven is the emblem of my soul," wrote Lamartine. Could all these great geniuses admire "despicable fictions."||

† James Macpherson, &c., *Ibid.*

‡ "Authenticity of the poems of Ossian."—P. MacNaughton, 1861.

§ P. MacNaughton's lecture on authenticity of Ossian's poems.

|| J. S. Smart's James Macpherson, 1905.

\* James Macpherson, an episode in literature.—David Nutt, London, 1905.

Against the above we put Dr. Johnson's absurd dictum when asked whether any modern man could have written such poems—"Yes, sir," he replied, "many men, many women, and many children"; and to Sir John Joshua Reynolds he replied—"Sir, a man might write such stuff for ever, if he would abandon his mind to it." William Hazlitt, one of the highest critics, was nearer the truth when he mentions—"four of the principal works of poetry in the world at different periods of history, Homer, the Bible, Dante, and, let me add, Ossian." Some may think he might have mentioned Shakespeare, but his enthusiasm went the length of saying that—"Ossian is a feeling and a name that can never be destroyed in the minds of his readers." What do renegade Highlanders and "brither Scots" say to that? Macpherson had to erect a monument to himself, as he felt certain no one else would do it! Had he been a German or Frenchman, an Italian or a Turk, he would have had homage in his own country; but being a Highlander, neither he nor Ossian deserved any notice from their countrymen! Matthew Arnold says:—

The Celts, with their vehement reaction against the despotism of fact, their adverse destiny, their immense calamities, are prime authors of this vein of piercing regret and passion—of this Titanism in poetry. A famous book, Macpherson's Ossian, carried in the last century this vein like a flood of lava through Europe. I am not going to criticise Macpherson's Ossian here. Make the part of what is forged, modern, tawdry, spurious, in the book as large as you please; strip Scotland if you like of every feather of borrowed plumes, which are the strength of Macpherson's Ossian, and he may have stolen from that

"Vetus et major Scotia," the true home of the Ossianic poetry. Ireland! I make no objection. But there will still be left in the book a residue with the very soul of the Celtic genius in it, and which has the proud distinction of having brought the soul of the Celtic genius into contact with the genius of the nations of modern Europe, and enriched all our poetry by it, Woody Morven and echoing Lora, and Selma, with its silent halls! We all owe them a debt of gratitude, and when we are unjust enough to forget it may the muse forget us! Choose any one of the better passages in Macpherson's Ossian, and you can see even at this time of day what an apparition of newness and power such a strain must have been to the 18th century.

The late Principal Shairp, Professor of Poetry at the University of St. Andrews (a Perthshire man), whose knowledge of Gaelic and of Ossian's poems entitled him to speak with confidence on the subject, declared that the sadness of Ossian was the surest proof of its antiquity, and argued that the fidelity of the descriptions of Highland scenery were also in favour of that vein, and that the late Professor Blackie, in his philological notes on the subject, had hit upon the true solution of the controversy. The learned Principal goes on—

His poetry is full of natural images, taken straight from the wilderness; the brown heath, the thistle down of the autumn air, the dark mountain cairns, the sighing winds, the movement of the mist and cloud, silence, and solitude; these are for ever recurring in impressive monotone. Even to this day, when one is alone in the lonliest places of the Highlands, in the wilderness where no man is, on the desolate moor of Rannoch, or among the grey boulders of Badenoch, when at such a time, if one wished a language to express the feeling that weighs upon the heart, where would one turn to find it? Not to Scott, not even to Wordsworth though the power of the hills was upon him, if upon any modern. Not

in these, but in the voice of Cona alone would the heart find a language that would relieve it. It is this fact, that there is something which is of the very essence of the Highland glens and mountains, something unexpressed by any modern poet, but which the old Ossian's poetry alone expresses; this, if nothing else, would convince me that the poetry which conveys this feeling is no modern fabrication, but is native to the hills, conatural, I had almost said, with the granite mountains, among which it has survived.¶

The late Professor Blackie made a special study of Ossian's poems, and having acquired a competent knowledge of the Gaelic language, besides being one of the most eminent philologists in Europe, after going through the whole of the originals held in opposition to Mr J. F. Campbell, that the Gaelic is unquestionably the original, brings forward the following tests by which a translator's hand is clearly discoverable:—

1st.—In the English version awkward, forced, and unidiomatic expressions frequently occur, which can be clearly traced to the influence of a Gaelic original.

2nd.—In all poems of any antiquity handed down in MSS., difficulties will occur, arising from obsolete words, errors in transcription, confused connection, and other causes. In such cases it is a common practice with translators to skip the difficulty, gloss over the matter with some decent commonplace, and sometimes to make positive blunders, which it is not difficult for a philologist to expose. All these signs of a translators hand are frequent in Macpherson's English, and would be more so had he not indulged in such a habit of skipping generally; that it is difficult to say in certain cases that the skip was made because the writer of the English wished to skip a difficulty.

3rd.—It is a common practice with translators, when they find a passage a little ob-

scure, to remove the obscurity by some manifest alteration of the phrase, or even by interpolating a line or interlarding a commentary. This also occurs in Macpherson.

4th.—It is not always that a translator writes under the same vivid vision, or the same fervid inspiration as the original poet. The instance of failure to seize the most striking features of the original, and the substitution of generic for specific epithets are frequent in Macpherson.

5th.—Most translators yield—sometimes, no doubt, wisely—to the temptation of improving on their originals, and Macpherson, from what we know of him, was the last man in the world to think of resisting such a temptation.\*

How much of the Gaelic, as we now have it—that is, his clean copy of his originals—was subjected to this process of beautification, no one can tell; but departures from the simplicity of the original can be traced in several instances. He thinks that the English as a whole is a translation from the Gaelic, and that this can be accepted as one of the best ascertained facts in the range of philological investigation. Philological induction, combined with the amount of external evidence to be found in the Highland Society's report, produce a cumulative proof which he was anxious to see how Mr J. F. Campbell could rebut.

We shall now retrace our steps a little, and introduce a couple of witnesses whose names were omitted from the long list already given of the supporters of Macpherson's Ossian. The following is an extract from Dr. John MacArthur's "Dissertation on the Authenticity of Ossian's Poems," published by the

\* James Macpherson, an episode in literature.—J. C. Smart, 1905.

\* There is hardly any warrant for the statement, Macpherson was no worse than other men.—Ed.



Highland Society of London in 1807. Dr. MacArthur, in referring to Dr. Blair's "Dissertation on Ossian," mentioned that—

There is a respectable list of clergymen and gentlemen who declare that they had assisted Mr Macpherson in collecting the poems; that they had furnished him with particular poems, which they mention; that they had looked over his MSS. in both languages, while he was occupied in the translation; that they had been accustomed to hear those pieces repeated from their infancy; that they themselves could repeat several of them; and that they never entertained the least suspicion of a forgery. These are facts distinctly attested by one or more respectable characters, who allow Dr. Blair to give their names to the public. Nay, more, five clergymen attest that they had taken the printed copy of Macpherson's translation in their hands, while persons, whose names and places of abode they mention, repeated, in the original, the poems they had received from tradition, and that the translations and those agreed exactly, except in a few variations which must ever happen in oral tradition.

Dr. James Lyden, poet and Oriental scholar, in his "Tour in the Highlands," written in 1800, admitted that with regard to Ossian's poems, he felt his "incredulity 'melting away' before the calm dispassionate conversation of the intelligent Rev. Donald MacNicol, of Lismore." Mr MacNicol informed him also that he knew the poems of Ossian before they were translated by Macpherson, and mentioned that the latter had offered to show his MSS. to Rev. Mr MacLagan, of Blair Atholl, but that Mr MacLagan had failed in the appointment from accident. The Rev. Mr Downie, the minister of a parish near Glenelg, informed him of an old man named MacCraw, in his parish, 100 years of age,

bed-ridden, deaf, and blind, who frequently amused himself

#### REPEATING OSSIAN'S POEMS

for whole days, and Mr Downie had heard him repeat many poems that had never been translated, and in particular the description of a battle by the Fingalians, in which cavalry were employed in crossing a river. Mr Fraser, of Rellich, eight miles from Inverness, told him he had heard Captain MacDonald, of Breakish, in Skye, repeat "Temora"; and Mr MacDonald, St. Martins, informed him that about thirty years before (1770), when at Airds, in Appin, he heard an old man repeat "Temora," till he was weary with listening. And the Rev. Mr MacLagan, of Blair Atholl, showed him a great number of Gaelic poems in MSS., both ancient and modern, and printed, and many poems and fragments published by Macpherson and Dr. Smith, and about a dozen that had never been translated.

The late Alexander Smith, who was an undoubted poetical genius, and frequent visitor to the West Highlands and Skye, was very much struck with the truth of the local colouring in the poems, which he considered a strong argument in favour of their antiquity. Now, James Macpherson was an inland Highlander, and knew little or nothing of coast scenery, and probably was never in a boat until he went to Skye, and the time he spent among the outer islands was far too short for him to comprehend its real meaning, far less to describe it so accurately and so graphically as in the Gaelic, and yet so true to nature as has been done in Ossian's poems. Something,



therefore in the way of better evidence is necessary before we can connect Macpherson's name with the authorship of the poems. In "A Summer in Skye,"† Smith delivers his opinions, as follows:—

Wandering up and down the Western Islands, one is brought into contact with Ossian and is launched into a sea of perplexities as to the genuineness of Macpherson's translation. That fine poems should have been composed in the Highlands so many centuries ago, and that these should have existed through that immense period of time in the memories and on the tongues of the common people, is sufficiently startling. The Border ballads are children in their bloom compared with the hoary Ossianic legends and songs. On the other hand, the theory that Macpherson, whose literary efforts, when he did not pretend to translate, are extremely poor and meagre, should have, by sheer force of imagination, created poems confessedly full of fine things, with strong local colouring, not without a weird sense of remoteness, with heroes shadowy as if seen through Celtic mists; poems, too, which have been received by (most of) his countrymen as genuine, and which Dr. Johnson scornfully abused, and which Dr. Blair enthusiastically praised, which have been translated into every language in Europe, which Goethe and Napoleon admired, from which Carlyle has drawn his "red son of the furnace" and many a memorable sentence besides, and over which, for more than a hundred years now, there has raged a critical and philological battle, with victory inclining to neither side—that the poor Macpherson should have created these poems is, if possible, more startling than their claim of antiquity. If Macpherson created Ossian, he was an athlete who made one surprising leap, and was palsied ever afterwards; a marksman who made a centre at his first shot, and who never afterwards could hit the target. It is well enough known that the Highlanders, like all half-civilised nations, had their legends and their minstrelsy; that they were fond of reciting poems and runes;

and that the person who retained on his memory the greatest number of tales and songs brightened the gatherings round the ancient peat-fires as your Sydney Smith brightens the modern dinner. And it is astonishing how much legendary material a single memory may retain. In illustration, Dr. Brown in his "History of the Highlanders" informs us that "the late Captain John MacDonald of Breakish, a native of the Island of Skye, declared upon oath, at the age of 78, that he could repeat, when a boy between twelve and fifteen years of age (about the year 1740), from one to two hundred Gaelic poems, differing in length and in number of verses, and that he learned them from an old man about 80 years of age, who sang them for years to his father when he went to bed at night, and in the spring and winter before he rose in the morning." The late Dr. Stewart minister of Luss, knew an old Highlander in the Isle of Skye, who repeated to him, for three successive days, and during several hours each day, without hesitation and with the utmost rapidity, many thousand lines of ancient poetry, and would have continued his repetitions much longer if the doctor had required him to do so." From such a raging torrent of song the doctor doubtless fled for his life.‡

Without a doubt there was a vast quantity of poetic material existing in the Highlands. So these songs are in the original strong, simple, picturesue, in decay; in Macpherson's English they are hybrids and mongrels. They resemble the Castle of Dunvegan, an amorphous mass of masonry of every conceivable style of architecture, in which the ninth century jostles the nineteenth.

In these poems, not only do the character and habit smack of the primeval time, but there is extraordinary truth of local colouring. The "Iliad" is roofed by the liquid softness of an Ionian sky. In the verse of Chaucer there is eternal May and the smell of newly-blossomed hawthorn hedges. In "Ossian," in like manner,

† London, 1866. Alex. Strachan.

‡ These repetitions are intended for short memories.

## THE SKIES ARE CLOUDY,

and there is a tumult of waves on the shore; the wind sings in the pine. This truth of local colouring is a strong argument in proof of authenticity. I, for one, will never believe that Macpherson was more than a somewhat free translator. Despite Gibbon's sneer, I do "indulge the supposition that Ossian lived and Fingal sang," and more than this, it is my belief that these misty phantasmal Ossianic fragments, with their car-borne heroes that come and go like clouds on the wind, their frequent apparitions, the "stars dim-twinkling through their forms," their maidens fair and pale as lunar rainbows, are in their own literary place worthy of every recognition. If you think these poems exaggerated, go out at Sligachan and see what wild work the pencil of moonlight makes on a mass of shifting vapour. Does that seem Nature, or a madman's dream? Look at the billowy clouds rolling off the brow of Blavin all golden, and on fire with the rising sun. Wordsworth's verse does not more completely mirror the Lake country than do the poems of Ossian the terrible scenery of the Isles. Grim and fierce and dreary as the night wind is the strain, for not with rose and nightingale had the old bard to do; but with the thistle waving on the ruin, the upright stones that mark the burying-places of heroes, weeping female faces white as the sea foam in the moon, the breeze mourning alone in the desert, the battles and friendships of his far-off youth, and the flight of the "dark-brown years." These poems are wonderful transcripts of Hebridean scenery. They are as full of

mists as the Hebridean glens themselves. Ossian seeks his images in the vapouring wraiths. Take the following of two chiefs parted by their King:—

They sink from their king on either side, like two columns of morning mist when the sun rises between them on his glittering rocks. Dark is their rolling on either side, each towards its reedy pool.

You cannot help admiring the image: and I saw the misty circumstance this very morning, when "the kingly sun struck the earth with his golden spear, and the cloven mists rolled backwards to their pools like guilty things."

That a large body of poetical MSS. existed in the Highlands we know. We know also that when challenged to do so, Macpherson

## PRODUCED HIS ORIGINALS

by depositing them at his publishers, and intimated by public advertisement that he had done so, stating that all persons interested in the matter might call and examine them. No one, however, called; Macpherson's pride was hurt, and he became thereafter more obstinately silent and uncommunicative than ever. There needed no such mighty pother about the production of manuscripts. It might have been seen at a glance that the Ossianic poems were not forgeries—at all events that Macpherson did not forge them. Even the English translation, to a great extent, the sentiments, the habits, the modes of thought described, are entirely primeval; in reading it we seem to breathe the morning air of the world.

"Reading the Ossianic fragments is like visiting the skeleton of one of the South American cities; like walking through

the streets of disinterred Pompeii or Herculaneum. These poems, if rude and formless, are touching and venerable as some ruin on the waste, the names of builders are unknown; whose towers and walls, although not erected in accordance with the lights of modern architecture, affect the spirit and fire the imagination far more than nobler and more recent piles; its chambers, now roofless to the day, were ages ago tenanted by life and death, joy and sorrow; its walls have been worn by time; its stones channelled and fretted by the fierce tears of winter rains; on broken arch and battlement every April for centuries has kindled a light of desert flowers, and it stands muffled with ivies, bearded with mosses, and stained with lichens by the suns of forgotten summers. The question arises, was Macpherson a competent and faithful translator of these MSS? Did he produce the original in all its strength and sharpness? On the whole, perhaps, Macpherson translated the ancient Highland poems as faithfully as Pope translated Homer; but his version is in many respects defective and untrue. The English Ossian is Macpherson's just as the most popular English Iliad is Pope's.\*

These are the opinions of a true poet, and one capable of judging, as he actually witnessed the bold scenery of the West Highlands, and had many opportunities of watching with an inspired eye the various transformations described in the poems of Ossian.

In charging the opposition camp at the point of the bayonet, all non-Gaelic-

speaking critics may expect the same consideration that a bull shows towards articles of vertue in a crockery shop. These people are no doubt very estimable men individually, but they are incompetent to deal with Ossian. No one ignorant of the Gaelic language can form a just opinion between the disputants. What would be said about one who argued about Greek or Hindustani, or any other language, who knew nothing of either? and a translation can be little better than a mere guide.

How can any outsider tell whether the Gaelic or the English of Ossian's poems was the original language? Does not that very fact prove his incompetence to try the case? Of this type of writer we find Mr J. W. Smart, who published a work in April, 1905, entitled "James Macpherson: An Episode in Literature."

He screens himself under the shadows of a few well-known Celtic scholars; but if we are to be bound by the opinions of a few, we must also reject Christianity as being a "fiction," for one of the most eminent philosophers in Europe says it is; and in the fulness of his own arrogance asserts that every educated man thinks the same!

On the first page of his preface, Mr Smart says that the poems of Ossian "are as full of lamentations as the Book of Job." This probably alludes to a passage quoted by Dr. Hugh Blair in his "Critical Dissertation" as follows, on the appearance of Trenmor's ghost to Oscar:—

Trenmor came from his hill at the voice of his mighty son. A cloud like the steed of the stranger supported his airy limbs. His robe is of the mist of Lano, that brings death

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\* A Summer in Skye.—By Alex. Smith.

to the people. His sword is a green meteor, half extinguished. His face is without form, and dark. He sighed thrice over the hero: and thrice the winds of the night roared around. Many were his words to Oscar. He slowly vanished like a mist that melts on the sunny hill.

Dr. Blair remarks—"To appearances of this kind we can find no parallel among Greek or Roman poets. They bring to mind that noble description in the Book of Job":—

In thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon man, fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake. Then a spirit passed before my face. The hair of my flesh stood up. It stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof. An image was before mine eyes. There was silence, and I heard a voice—"Shall mortal man be more just than God."†

The resemblance between Job and Ossian ends there.

The assertion is reiterated that the poems are Macpherson's own composition, worked out of some ancient ballads. If so, how is it that they are so infinitely superior to the said ballads and to Macpherson's English? Even the late Mr J. F. Campbell, who is so often quoted as a successful adversary, and "the greatest Scottish authority on Ossianic literature," says that "Ossian" is a structure "founded upon facts—a work built mainly of Scotch materials, worked by Scotch minds long ago," which, of course, takes it out of the hands of the Irish entirely. If Scotch minds "long ago" produced the poems of Ossian, why not Ossian himself? It must never be forgotten that Mr J. F. Campbell was one hundred years too late of entering

the field, and however much respect may be due to his labours, we can't for one moment accept his conclusions. His work was mainly done by his coadjutor, Hector MacLean, a clever grammarian and schoolmaster, one of those destructive critics who felt on safe ground so long as Macpherson's originals could not be recovered.

As regards those who want

#### HISTORICAL PROOF

of everything, word for word, and line for line, copies of Macpherson's "Ossian," though these have not been found, closely similar compositions were discovered, and there was nothing to prevent Macpherson finding the poems which he translated. He found the ballads also, and rejected them as being non-Ossianic.

The same argument applies with much stronger force to such a collection of ancient ballads as "Scott's Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border," which does not suffer the disadvantage of being a translation.

It is certain that no literal copy of any one of the ballads collected and published by Sir Walter Scott could have been found by Yarrow or among the Cheviot Hills. The printed versions were collected by Scott from the recitals of various persons, and bear only part resemblance to the tradition of each.

In the same way Macpherson collected the various copies of ancient poems which he managed to procure. Such gaps in the poems as occur in "Golna-dona" and the first duan of "Ca-Lodin" offer testimony to his style of work. This fact, together with the difficulty translation inevitably introduces, besides the altering of titles and phoneticising of names which Macpherson effected, was quite sufficient to preclude the

† Job, iv., '3-17.

possibility of any of his transcripts being found complete and exact in the original.\*

The report of the Highland Society alludes to this circumstance. It says:—

The advantage he (Macpherson) possessed, which the committee began its inquiries too late to enjoy, of collecting from the oral recitation of a number of persons, now no more, a very great number of the same poems on the same subjects, and then collating these different copies or editions, if they may be so called, rejecting what was spurious or corrupted, in one copy, and adopting from another something more genuine and excellent in its place, afforded him an opportunity of putting together what might fairly enough be called an original whole of much more beauty, and with much fewer blemishes than the committee believe it now possible for any person or combination of persons to obtain.

Regarding the Irish poems concerning Fion, Macpherson says of them:—"They are so inconsistent and notoriously fabulous that they do not deserve to be mentioned, for they evidently bear along with them the marks of late invention." "Giants, enchanted castles, dwarfs, pal-freys, witches on broomsticks hovering round him like crows!" That's the sort of literature that is "now accessible to all!" Mr Smart, in his book, says:—"If the world be asked to choose between Macpherson and Samuel Johnson, it will declare at once for the latter." Not our Ossian. It was Johnson who said there was not in existence a Gaelic MS. 100 years old, and that women and children could have composed these poems! Mr Smart, by way of appearing impartial, quotes from all and sundry; but there are so many of the passages against his own contention that I am surprised he

meddled with the subject. It has never been proved, and never can be, that Macpherson was the author of these poems. Mr Smart's capacity for the work he has undertaken is well seen on page 10 of his book:—

The burden of his songs can best be shown by a citation. It is the "Address to the Sun," the most famous passage of all.

Will Mr Smart "be surprised to learn" that Macpherson did not publish a translation of the "Address to the Sun," though it was well known to be in his possession? And the translation of the Gaelic is not—

O thou that rollest above, round as the shield of my fathers! Whence are thy beams, O sun! thy everlasting light? Thou comest forth in thy awful beauty; the stars hide themselves in the sky, the moon, cold and pale, sinks in the western wave, etc.

But is—

O thou that travellest on high,  
Round as warriors' hard, full shield,  
Whence thy brightness without gloom,  
Thy light which lasts so long, O Sun?  
Thou comest in thy beauty strong,  
And the stars conceal their path,  
The moon, all pale, forsakes the sky, etc.

If we turn the tables and ask some of these persistent questioners as to original MSS., what about Miss Brooke's "Reliques of Irish Poetry"? What do we find? These ballads were published in 1788, long after Macpherson had published "Ossian." The translation is poetical, but far more paraphrastic than Macpherson's. Her Irish originals were printed from the writing of Mr O'Halaran, who had no ancient manuscripts to show, and who was never asked to show them! It was of this party that



Mr Hugh Campbell, F.S.A.,† writing in 1882, remarked:—

Bating the fanciful assertions of the Irish historians, Keating, O'Flaherty, and O'Halloran, which have long since been proved fabulous, illusive, nugatory, and absurd by the hand of Time, we find that the frequent descents of Fingal upon the coast of Ireland were wholly occasioned by the distress or wants of his kinsmen of the Caledonian race of Irish Kings, or, more properly speaking, Kings of Ulster. It is necessary for outsiders to remember that Trenmor, the great grandfather of Fingal had two sons Trahal, the grandfather of Fingal, and Connor, called by the bards "Connor the Great." This Connor appears by Ossian to have been elected King or Chief of Ireland, and was ancestor of Cormac, who sat on the Irish throne, when Swaran, King of Norway or Lochlinn, invaded Ireland, and Fingal held the sceptre in Morbheinn (Morven). Fingal married Ros-Crana, daughter of Cormac, the second Irish King, and she was the mother of Ossian. It will thus be seen that the Ulster and West Highland royal families were nearly related to each other, which has caused a great deal of confusion in regard to the Ossianic dispute, each claiming the blind poet as a countryman.

The principal residence of the Irish monarchs, according to Ossian, was at Temora, in Ulster. This Temora was at the foot of the hill of Mora, which rose near the borders of the heath of Lena, or Moi Lena, near the mountain Cromla. As, however, the opposition deny the existence of a Moi Lena in Ulster, the facts regarding it will be taken up a little later on. Meantime Mr Smart has to be further dealt with.

On page 14 of his book, Mr Smart, regarding Goethe and his adoption of the songs of Selma in preference to Homer for the "Sorrows of Werther," says

—"In his later years when he had come to speak of Ossian with contempt, he explained Werther's love of it was the sign of a morbid mind. Werther," he said, "had praised Homer while he retained his senses, and Ossian when he was going mad." No intelligent person will accept that a genius like Goethe, who went about "preaching them earnestly among his friends," would ever admit afterwards that they were worthy of contempt. The assertion rests entirely on a passage from the diary of Henry Crabb Robinson, an English barrister, who made the acquaintance of Goethe at Jena, and was incompetent to form a correct opinion. He probably knew as little of German as he did of Gaelic.

"In Temora, where his faults culminated (p. 17), the reader stops midway in bewilderment, scarcely grasping even the outline of the story." That would depend on the kind of reader, and his capacity for appreciating poetry when he saw it. The famous Rev. Dr. John Smith of Campbeltown, one of the best Gaelic scholars of his day, held a different opinion. He declares that "a poet in his closet could no more compose like Ossian than he could act like him in the field, or on the mountain."

He goes on to say that "in the 7th Book of Temora, the language as well as the ideas, the kind of verse, the whole texture of the composition, the every thing about it, wears such an air of antiquity, and has so venerable, so grave, and so uncommon a cast that the first critics in the language scruple not to affirm that a modern could no more compose it than he could by

† An Irishman.



charms bring down the moon from heaven."\*

That should convince Mr Smart that there are two sides to the question.†

Dr. Smith further observes that to imitate with success the manner of Ossian will be found difficult, but to counterfeit his style, his verse, and very language, infinitely more so. Within these 30 years one or two professed Gaelic poets have attempted it, but they had only gone through a few stanzas when they discovered, what every competent judge had discovered before they had gone through so many lines, how unable they were to support the character which they personated. They immediately threw aside the mask which so ill befitted them, and never afterwards resumed it. One of these poets was in Glendovan, Argyllshire, and the other in Glenloch, Perthshire.

"The fidelity of the descriptions," says Mr Smart, "can prove nothing for the date of the poems." Of course not, but it proves that an inland Highlander like Macpherson was not familiar with sea pieces and west coast scenery and climate. The person who composed Ossian's poems must have been familiar with

#### THE WEST HIGHLANDS

from his infancy. The "sadness" of which he complains so much is nothing to Edward Young's "Night Thoughts," and many other poems. Too much has been made of the melancholy character of these poems. There is, of course, a great deal of fighting and slaying and sentimental love displayed; but "if they always fell," they were generally victorious, after which they had their feasts,

and songs and music and some mysterious liquor which they drank out of shells, which seem to have been the only crockery that the Fingalians possessed. The beauty of Ossian is in the apparent truth of his narratives. His descriptions of the "wild and grand, with which he was familiar, and his own vast genius, were the only resources to which he cared to be indebted for his ornaments. By this means his compositions are marked with a signature which they could never receive from the lamp or from the closet, a signature which he alone could impress, who saw before him in that apartment in which he mused those objects which he describes, who bore a part in those expeditions which he celebrates, and who fought in those battles which he sings."

"The suppression of the '45 Rebellion" had nothing to do with the inspiration of Ossian. All it did was to bring about the extinction of the bards, and to change the

#### HABITS OF THE PEOPLE,

which were formerly so conducive to the preservation of the poems. We shall now quote one of Mr Smart's contradictions of himself. On p. 30, Madame de Stael, speaking of the melancholy of English poems, "propounds the question, why the English, who are happy in their government and their manners, have a much more melancholy imagination than the French?" This very problem of English melancholy—the gravity and dejection of the English poets—was also discussed by Goethe, who put forward his own solution. "And it is true that about that period our poetry had taken a melancholy bent"! Why, then, find fault with

\* Smith's "Gaelic Antiquities,"

† Lord Kaimes in his "Sketches of Man" produces many direct and collateral proofs of the authenticity of Ossian's poems.

Ossian? The above is something like all the other objections, such as—"It was all Macpherson's own work"; "figments of Macpherson's brain"; "he borrowed his 'Ossian' from the ballads"; "it's as much his own as 'Paradise Lost' was Milton's"; "the key to Macpherson's secret is in our hands," etc., etc. It is hardly necessary to point out that all these and similar expressions are pure fictions. No one knows, and no one can ever know what Macpherson had; but one thing is certain that he had a great deal more than we have, and that he was quite incapable of composing the poems of Ossian. Similarly with "Mor-bheann"—not the district of Morvern—and "Selma" and other royal place names. Though there is no mention of a King of the great mountains, Fingal was known in the West Highlands as "Rìgh na Feinn" (the King of the Feinne), and "Selma," where his palace was (in Upper Lorn), still bears that name, and there are more than a

#### THOUSAND PLACE NAMES

throughout the Highlands relating to Fingal and his heroes.† With reference to the MacLagan MSS., Mr Smart says that the minister of Amulrie's MSS., which had been preserved by his family, were brought to light, edited, and published, but they were not in his own handwriting, and he omits to mention that Mr MacLagan's collection sent to the Highland Society has also been lost, though his family did the best they could to make good the loss of the originals. Now comes the crucial point. If Mac-

pherson made use of "Duan a Ghairb" (The Lay of Garbh), and "Teanntach mhor na Feinne" (The great strait of the Finns) for his "Fingal," as "Reliquæ Celticæ" asserts, how is it that, according to Mr Smart, Macpherson regarded them as "modern, the work of a pretended Ossian"? Macpherson was the last man who would accept of a modern composition for his collection. It is not likely that he used either of these poems for his "Fingal," because in his letter of 10th January, 1761, thanking Mr MacLagan, he says—"It is true I have most of them from other hands; but the misfortune is that I find none expert in the Irish orthography, so that an obscure poem is rendered doubly so by their uncouth spelling." Now, it is quite clear from this that he could not read these poems, especially the "Teantach mor na Feine," and that it was on a first partial perusal he considered it "valuable for the ancient manner it contains." But, better still, these critics conceal the fact that in the same letter Macpherson says—"I have been lucky enough to lay my hands on a pretty complete poem, and truly epic, concerning Fingal." It is evident, therefore that he did not require to use either of these poems for his "Fingal."

There is no evidence worthy of the name to prove that "the ballads were the only originals Macpherson ever had." He rejected these entirely as being non-Ossianic, that is, not composed by Ossian. Some might have been mixed up with Ossian's poems, but the latter are quite a separate and distinct style of poetry,

† See A. Carmichael's "Deirdire," and other works on "Ossian."

‡ Macpherson's spelling—"Duan a Ghairibh," and "Teantach mor na Feine."

which any true Highlander with a knowledge of Gaelic can at once distinguish from the other. The same would be Greek to a Cockney. The most extraordinary thing is that neither Englishmen nor many non-Gaelic-speaking Scotsmen, with a few Highlanders could see anything striking in what delighted and charmed foreigners. Schiller, in his "Essay on the Sublime," declared that a "truer inspiration lay in the misty mountains and wild cataracts of Scotland than in the fairest of meadows and gardens."

Regarding the existence of two Oscars, nothing is more natural than that there should be more than one under such a famous name. The wonder is that there were not a dozen of them. The period is too remote for any of us to dogmatise on the subject, but it may be remarked that Macpherson explained how a more correct copy of the original reached his hand, by which means he hastened to correct an error into which he had fallen regarding Oscar, the son of Ossian, killed by Caibre, and Oscar, the son of Caruth, who killed Dermid; besides, he was not positively certain whether the poem was by Ossian, or by one who closely imitated his style. The third Oscar mentioned in Fenian legend as son of Garry, or Garraidh, may have been the same as Caruth's son, and the legend may not have been fact, and

#### THE POET'S LICENCE

must also be borne in mind. If Macpherson did trip here, it was the only instance. Several Gaelic poets have thought that Ossian had close imitators, but all modern ones who tried signally failed.

There is a tendency here, as elsewhere,

on the part of the compiler of "James Macpherson" to believe in legends in preference to Ossian's poems, which is remarkable, to say the least of it.

"Macpherson then produced spurious Highland poetry from the first day of his appearance as a translator. Why did he thus deceive John Home?" There is not a particle of evidence to prove that he deceived John Home, or anybody else. Mr J. F. Campbell, who figures so largely in the book under consideration as "the greatest authority on Ossianic literature," admits that the "fragments" were perfectly genuine. How, then, could Macpherson have deceived John Home?

The doubt expressed as to "Caracalla" being a nick-name invented later, and scarcely used by the Romans till after his death," can be easily explained. The objection is a very trivial one. Ossian was not born when the battle of the Carron was fought. He was old when these poems were written, and the son of Severus was nicknamed "Caracalla" four years after the battle of the Carron was fought, so there was plenty of time for the name to

#### REACH THE CALEDONIANS.

Macpherson translates Caracul by "fierce eye," "garg-shùil," or of old, "Carg," or "Karg"-shùil, pronounced "garachuil," and the transition is not far to "caracul." It might also be translated "short tunic," or "dress." The word now written "garr" was of old written with a hard "c" or "k"—"kearr," or "carr"—and signifies "short," while "culaidh," pronounced "kuli," signifies "dress," or "covering."

Thus the two names seem to be the

same, but "fierce eye" would have done just as well, as Covalla distinctly mentions that her enemy was the son of the king of the world, as shall be afterwards explained. Caracalla was a fierce looking man, and no doubt suited the appellation given him by the Caledonians, or the Romans might have adopted the nickname from them. Another objection is the use of the bow and arrow in battle, so frequently mentioned in Ossian, and the reason given is that "the bow was not often employed by the Celts of the heroic age," and because "the Irish are silent on the subject." This is another instance of ignorance warping the judgment. Bows and arrows have been used since prehistoric times. The Caledonians who fought Agricola's legions at the Grampians, and they were Celts, used them, as historians record that bows were in use. They were used, though perhaps not in every battle, from that period down to the battle of Inverlochy in 1431, when "Alistair Carrach" with his archers made his famous charge at the head of the Lochaber men, and scattered the royal troops. The firbolgs, quiver men, or arrow men, must also have used them against the Irish, so if they are silent on the subject, it does not follow that these were not extensively used.

#### IN ANCIENT TIMES,

until spears and other weapons superseded them. In any case, the silence of the Irish does not affect Ossian's poems.

One of the most flimsy objections is where it is pointed out that Macpherson "had placed Moylena\* in Ulster, instead of King's County, and Temora, that is,

Tara, in Ulster, whilst it is actually in Meath." We don't deny that there is a Moylena in King's County, but that does not affect the one in Ulster. The place is mentioned three times in Tiernach under the years 161, 565, and 682 A.D., as in Ulster. In Ossian the most marked distinction is made between "Tura" and Teamhar, or Temora. The former appears in Ossian to have been a seat of the Cruithne in Ulster,† while he places the latter considerably to the south, without marking out its real situation, and implies that it was the seat of the Irish kings.

Patrick MacGregor, M.A.,‡ barrister, says:—

It has been urged that Ossian places *Moi-lena*—the plain of *Lena*—in Ulster, whereas it is in Meath. The objection would be inconclusive, even if we could not now discover any such name in Ulster; because it is very possible, that sixteen hundred years ago, there may have been in that province a *Lena* of which no trace could be found. But the fact is that, as Mr Skene observes, every Irish antiquary knows there is a plain of *Lena* in Ulster as well as in Meath, frequently mentioned in the annals. *Tigernach* has "*Raith mor Muighe Line*," in Ulster. The objection, therefore, only proves the ignorance or disingenuousness of those who urge it.

A great deal has been written about the Red Book of Clanranald to Macpherson's detriment. The facts seem to be that at one time it really did contain some Ossianic poetry, but "its covers have been cut off, and it has lost the first 32 pages. How much it has lost at the end it is now impossible to say

† Skene's *Highlanders of Scotland*, 1837.

‡ *The Genuine Remains of Ossian*. By Patrick MacGregor, M.A., &c., 1841.

\* Or *Moi-lena*.

That it once contained Ossianic poetry is certain; it now contains none.”\*

As to the doubt expressed regarding the veracity of the Rev. Mr M'Diarmid, of Weem, and the two “Addresses to the Sun,” nothing can be plainer or more straightforward than the rev. gentleman's account of them:—

I got the copy of these poems about 30 years ago, from an old man in Glenlyon. I took it and several other fragments, now I fear irrecoverably lost, from the man's mouth. He had learned them in his youth from people in the same glen, which must have been long before Macpherson was born.”

That is much liker the truth than that Goethe, after adopting some of them for his “Werther” should afterwards speak of them with contempt. Mr M'Diarmid further says:—

I had at one time a considerable number of old poems, some of them part of what Macpherson has translated; but by lending them from hand to hand, I cannot now possibly trace them out.

Captain Morrison's copy of the “Address to the Sun” differs from Mr MacDiarmid's original “Address” in Carthon in the 7th, 14th, 26th, 33rd, 34th, and 35th lines, clearly showing that the one was not a copy of the other.

Upon the whole, Mr J. L. Smart's book, as a contribution to the Ossianic controversy, exhibits great bias against the authenticity throughout, from the very first page to the last. He evidently knew nothing of the subject himself, but had a capital library at his elbow like the Berlin scholar, Dr. Stern, and is almost as violent in his denunciations. It is perfectly transparent, however, that he

just reiterates the views of well-known Celtic writers, whose opinions are quite familiar to readers of Ossian. As Matthew Arnold says:—

Strip Scotland, if you like, of every feather of borrowed plumes, but there will still be left in the book (Ossian) a residue with the very soul of the Celtic genius in it, and which has the proud distinction of having brought this soul of the Celtic genius into contact with the genius of the nations of modern Europe, and enriched all our poetry by it.

All the modern Gaelic poets put together could not have produced the Gaelic “Ossian” as we have it from Macpherson's English. The thing would be simply impossible to make it passable, and anyone who thinks otherwise can try it. There are eleven poems for which we have no Gaelic, and if anyone can put one or all these into

#### ANCIENT GAÉLIC

and ideas without tripping, it will be a good argument against Macpherson; but it must be poetry.

Though the era of Fingal and Ossian can't be proved to the satisfaction of all, there is strong evidence of their having lived at a very remote period, especially as regards certain incidents which agree with well ascertained facts in history.

In Colville's “Whigg's Supplications,” written about 1680, the author mentions Fingal, and makes him a native of Scotland. Sir David Lindsay, in his “Satyre of the Three Estates,” and Wm. Dunbar, in his poem called “Interlude of the Droichis,” both speak of the same hero, the latter making him a Highlander. Johnston, in the preface to his “Scottish History,” says that the ancient Scots had their “Homers and Moros,” whom they

\* *Reliquæ Celticæ*, vol. II., 1891.

termed bards. They sang the achievements of their brave men in heroic verses adapted to the harp, and roused the minds of that generation to virtue, and transmitted examples of valour to posterity.

Buchanan, the historian, also, after mentioning the great respect paid to the bards and the privileges they enjoyed, says "they compose poems by no means rude, which the rhapsodists recite to the chiefs or to the common people, who are eager to hear them, and they sometimes sing them to musical instruments."

Speaking of the Hebrideans, he says they sing poems by no means inelegant, which generally contain the praises of valiant men, and their bards hardly ever treat of any other subject—a further proof in favour of the bards.

Though old chroniclers make no mention of Fingal, yet we find they place one Fin Docus (Fin the Good) in the middle of the third century, the very period at which, according to the poems, Fingal must have flourished, while the qualities ascribed to this prince exactly accord with

#### THOSE OF FINGAL.

They tell us he was tall, strong, and fair, humane, faithful to his promises, and equitable in the distribution of justice, and his contests with the islanders bear a considerable resemblance to those of Fingal with the Scandinavians and Irish Belgue. It is now unquestionable that the old system of Scottish history is incorrect, but that those kings called fabulous were all mythic personages, is exceedingly improbable, because a system of pure fiction could hardly ever have

been received as authentic history, and the truth in all likelihood is that they were really chiefs famous in tradition, who were gradually arranged into a regular succession of Scottish kings by ill-informed prejudiced chroniclers. It is therefore highly probable that the prototype of this Findocus was no other than the Fin or Fingal of Ossian.†

Moore, in his "History of Ireland," says that Ossian makes Cuchullin contemporary with Fingal, while some Irish bards and chroniclers, who go by their authority, assign him a more remote era—the 1st century—but he gravely tells us that he was knighted at the age of seven, and that these bards and chronic-

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NOTE.—Barbour, in his heroic poem "The Bruce," written about 1380, makes the Lord of Lorne compare the conduct of King Robert at the battle of Dalree to that of Gaul defending himself against Fingal:—

"He said, methink Mactheoes son  
Right as Gow Macmorn was won  
To have frae Fyngal his menzie."

Colville's "Whiggs Supplications," 1680, says:—

"One man (quoth he) oft times hath stood,  
And put to flight a multitude:  
Luike Sampson, Wallace, and Sir Brewis,  
And Fin MacKoul beside the Lewis."

Sir David Lindsay, in his "Satire of the Three Estates," says:—

"Here is a relict lang and braid  
Of Fyn MacCoul. the richt chaft blaid,  
With teeth and altogether."

Dunbar says —

"My fore grand syr hecht Fyn MacCoul,  
That dang the deil and gart him youle."‡

And again—

"Five thousand ellis gard till his frog (kilt),  
Of Hieland ploddis and mair."

Two of these make him out a Highlander.

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† The Genuine Remains of Ossian by Patrick MacGregor, M.A., Barrister, 1811.

‡ The thra-thing given to the Deil probably alludes to Fingal's conflict with Cru Lodin.



lers are mere romancers, and commit the most egregious anachronisms, making Ossian contemporary with Cormac in the third century, and with St. Patrick in the fifth century, and prolonging his existence even till the 12th century! One of the best reasons for assigning the poems to the 3rd century is the internal evidence which they afford.

In the dramatic poem of Covala (Caomh-mhala—mild eye-brow) there are incidents mentioned which place it in the 3rd century with considerable probability, if not with actual certainty, provided always that the Roman historians are correct, as the "Caracul" mentioned in it is the same with "Caracalla," the son of the Emperor Severus, who in the year 211 A.D. commanded an expedition against the Caledonians. The passages are too long to quote, but tradition has handed down the story that Covala or Comala, the daughter of Sarno, King of Inistore or Orkney Islands, fell in love with Fingal, the son of Cumhal, at a feast to which her father had invited him upon his return from Lochlin, after the death of Agandecca. Her passion was so violent that she followed him disguised like a youth who wanted to be employed in his wars. She was soon discovered by Hildallan,\* the son of Lamor,† one of Fingal's heroes, whose love she had slighted before. Her romantic passion and beauty recommended her so much to the King that he had resolved to make her his wife, when the news was brought him of

#### CARACALLA'S EXPEDITION.

He marched to stop the progress of the enemy, and Covala attended him. He left her on a hill within sight of Caracul's army, having previously promised, if he survived, to return that night. One of the dramatis personæ, Melhul-cova‡ describes an ominous appearance she had just witnessed—a stag with his antlers wreathed in flame, and the forms of the dead, seen in light. Her sister, Darsa-graine,§ interprets it as a sign of the death of Fingal. Melhul-cova noticing Covala as she sat alone intently gazing on the plain, asked her where Fingal was? Covala, awakened from her reverie, speaks as follows:—

Carron, O Carron of Streams!

Why see I thy waters in blood.

and asks if Morven's king, the great one, had slept. She calls upon the daughter of the night (the moon) to look down from heavens' clouds, "or thou blue lightning of death come with hissing flash" from Ardnæn, to show her her brave one in light. "Stretched on the field, while I am full of tears," etc. Hildallan now approaches and says that "the chiefs of shields are leaderless on the field."

Covala, recoiling from the belief in the reality of the dark vision, asks—"Who has fallen at Carron of banks, son of the darkness of night which is cold"?

Hildallan again declares that he is indeed dead, and she breaks forth—

Trouble track thee on the field,  
May danger aye be thine, Great King;  
Unto the grave not many be thy steps,  
One maid be left behind in sorrow;  
Be she as Covala under gloom, etc.

\* Hildallan signifies "lightning."

† Lamor—Làmh Mhor—"large hand."

‡ "Meallshùil-Chaomh," "winning and mild eye."

§ "Dearra-Greine," "sunshine" or "sunbeam."

After beseeching those who are to build his tomb not to place him out of her sight, Melhul-Cova, hearing the voice of people advancing towards them, asks who they are? Covala, anticipating every woe, says:—

Co ach an nàmhaid aig caomh-mhal  
Mac rìgh an domhain 's a shluagh.

Who but he that is Covala's foe,  
The world King's son, and his host, etc.

Fingal, ignorant of all that had taken place, calls on his bards to celebrate his victory at Carron.

Raise ye, ye mouths of song,  
Raise on high the war at Carron!  
Fled Caracul and his hosts from my arms,  
Fled he across the fields of pride.¶

Darsa-graine now informs Fingal that Covala had killed three deer, and invites him to the feast which she had prepared for him. Again, charging his bards to express his joy in going to her feast, he says:—

Raise a voice, ye race of tunes,  
On the conflict of strong ones at Carron!  
Be joy to the white-hand of hills,  
When I behold her feast on Ardden.

Then the bards sing:—

Roll. O Carron, roll thy stream,  
In joy to-day do thou flow onward;  
Fled have the strangers of the haughtiest  
voice,  
No more shall their war horse be seen on the  
hill.

In the beginning of Carrie-Thura there is also mention of the battle of the Carron—

The conflict of Carron is far away.

Taking the whole poem of Covala, it supplies very strong evidence in favour of the antiquity of Ossian's poems. The

#### REMARKABLE COINCIDENCE

of the description of the battle at Carron, corresponding with historical facts, can't be explained away by saying that "Caracul" might not have been Caracalla, the son of the Emperor Severus, for Covala distinctly states that her enemies are—

Mac rìgh an domhain 's a shluagh,  
The son of the King of the world and his  
host.

The victory must have been pretty complete, as the bards talk of a long peace, and say that the sounding shields will hang against the wall, that their future foes will be strangers that come from the north, and that their hands shall redden in the blood of Lochlin.

From this it is evident that the Norsemen must have been troublesome prior to the time of the battle on the Carron, and the latter being the well-known river Carron, or winding river, near Stirling, in the vicinity of the Roman wall and camp, it is clear that the Caledonians made a distinction between the two hostile peoples.

The frequent allusion by many writers to Ossian and St. Patrick for the purpose of confusing issues demands some further notice here. The persecution begun by Dioclesian in the year 303 A.D. is the most probable time in which the first dawning of Christianity in the north of Britain can be fixed. The humane and mild character of Constantius Chlorus, then in Britain, induced the persecuted Christians to take refuge under him. These missionaries took possession of the cells and groves of the Druids, and it was from this retired life they had the

¶ Or "The fields of the height."

name of Culdees (Culdich or Cuiltich). Be that as it may, it was with one of these

#### EARLY MISSIONARIES

that Ossian, in his old age, disputed concerning the Christian religion. If Ossian then lived at the introduction of Christianity, his epoch would be the latter end of the 3rd century and beginning of the 4th century.

The exploits of Fingal against Caracalla, the son of the "King of the World," are among the first brave actions of his youth. In the year 210 A.D. the Emperor Severus, after returning from his expedition against the Caledonians, took ill at York and died there. So it was in 211 that the battle of the Carron alluded to in the poem was fought against his son Caracalla. The space of time between 211 and the beginning of the 4th century is not so great but Ossian might have seen the Christians whom the persecutions of Dioclesian had driven beyond the pale of the Roman Empire.

In one of the many lamentations on the death of Oscar, a battle which he fought against "Caros" on the banks of the Carron is mentioned among his great actions. This may or may not have been Carausius, "King of ships," who assumed the purple in 287; but since he repaired Agricola's wall in the neighbourhood of the Carron to obstruct the

#### INCURSIONS OF THE CALEDONIANS,

it was probably the same. Too much, however, is made of the dates given by the Irish writers and historians.

There is no certainty that Fingal died in 283 A.D. Some of the historical writers of the 10th and 11th centuries say

that it was in 252, others in 283. According to the 4 masters, Oscar and Cairber were killed at the battle of Gabhra in 284; others say it was in 296!

Ossian does not say how or when his father, Fingal, died; but we have some evidence concerning it from the poems themselves "Fingal," Duan V., line 420, where he tells us how for days and nights he sits on the hill by his tomb, touching it with his hands, as he can no longer see it, and as tradition points to Glenalmond and Killin as being the localities where both were buried, we accept this locality as the most likely, in absence of better evidence.

In ancient times, when people lived so much in the open air, it is quite possible that some might still be vigorous at the age of 100 years. The writer saw a man in Skye in 1894 hale and hearty and able to run at the age of 107.\* At that age he could walk many miles. Iain Lom is said to have composed a song at the age of 100. This has been denied; but the evidence in its favour is strong. It is no use therefore fighting about dates in the early centuries. The main point is the poems are there, and we know from their character, their vigorous and figurative language and sublime ideas that James Macpherson, though clever, was not equal to the task of conceiving or composing them, which could only have been done by some untrained natural

\*James Grieve, a shepherd of Glenquailch, Glen-garry, is still living at Whistlefield, Loch Long side, at the age of 107, and in possession of all his faculties, and able to do a fair day's work; and James Mac-Nally, a native of King's County, aged 109, still living in the Home of the Little Sisters, South Lambeth, is in the possession of all his faculties, and is a moderate smoker and drinker of spirits, especially rum.

genius long before Macpherson's time, and we have the best evidence of that in his own published writings and the opinions of contemporaries capable of judging after being in contact with him, and of most impartial and modern poets.

Though of course the question could be argued, the dialect of the Celtic tongue spoken in the north and west of Scotland seems much more full, more agreeable to its mother language—the writer is aware of treading upon tender toes here—and more abounding in primitives than that now spoken, or which has been written for centuries among the most unmixed part—if there is any such part—of the Irish nation. The wretched writing and contractions of ancient Irish MSS., and no doubt their equally bad spelling, perhaps done phonetically by uneducated persons, can never settle the superiority or priority of Irish Gaelic. From the time of the Dananns and Firbolgs, they have been more or less mixed with other races, and these must have influenced their language considerably. Though the Norsemen left their mark in the way of place-names in the West Highlands, they did not destroy the language. A Highlander conversant with his own language understands Irish compositions. An Irishman, on the other hand, without the aid of study, can't understand a composition in the Gaelic tongue, affording some proofs that

#### THE SCOTCH GAELIC

is the most original, and consequently the language of a more ancient and unmixed people.

The Irish call their own language "Gaelic Eirinnach," that is Caledonian Irish, and the dialect of North Britain they call "A Ghaelie," or the Caledonian tongue.

The traditional poems of the Irish concerning the Fiona, or the heroes of "Fion MacComnal," say that Fion was a General of the militia of Ireland in the reign of Cormac in the 3rd century; but where Keating and O'Flaherty learned that Ireland had an embodied militia so early has not transpired.

The bard who describes Fion's gigantic size cedes him to Scotland in the following lines:—

Fion O Albin, Siol nan laoich!

Fion from Albion, race of heroes!

The Irish poems concerning the Fiona fix the death of Fingal in 286 A.D.; yet his son, Ossian, is made contemporary with St. Patrick, who preached the Gospel in Ireland about the middle of the fifth age! Ossian, though at that time he must have been two hundred and fifty years of age, had a daughter young enough to become wife to the Saint. On this account he was frequently in Ossian's house, and drunk freely.† This is in "Teantach mor na Fiona," founded on "The Battle of Lora." The circumstances and catastrophe in both are much the same, but the Irish Ossian discovers the age in which he lived by an unlucky anachronism. After describing the total route of Erragon, he concludes with this remarkable anecdote, that none of the foe escaped but, a few who were permitted to go on

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† "Lo don rabh Padric na mhor,  
Gun Saim air uidh, ach a gòl'  
Ghluais é thighe Ossian mhic Fhion,  
O san leis bu bhlun a ghloir."

a pilgrimage to the Holy Land! This circumstance fixes the date of the composition of the piece some centuries after the famous Crusade, for it is evident the poet thought the time of the Crusade so ancient that he confounded it with the age of Fingal.

No wonder should James Macpherson reject "Teantach mor na Fiona" as spurious, though at first glance he considered it "interesting on account of the ancient manners it contained." Erragon, in the course of this poem, is often called—

Rìgh Lochlin an dà shlòigh.

King of Denmark of two nations—

which alludes to the union of the kingdoms of Norway and Denmark, which happened under Margaret de Waldemar at the close of the 14th century. Modern, however, as this pretended Ossian was, it is certain he lived before the Irish had dreamed of appropriating Fion or Fingal to themselves. He concludes the poem with this reflection—

Had Erragon, son of Annir of gleaming swords, avoided the equal contest of arms (single combat), no Chief should have afterwards been numbered in Albion, and the heroes of Fion should no more be named.

The next poem is "Cath-cabhra," or the death of Oscar. This piece is founded on the same story which we have in the first book of "Temora." So little thought the author of "Cath-cabhra" of making Oscar his countryman, that in the course of 200 lines of which the poem consists, he puts the following expression three times in the mouth of the hero—

Albin an sa d'roina m'arach.

Albion, where I was born and bred

In one circumstance, the bard

#### DIFFERS FROM OSSIAN.

After Oscar was mortally wounded by Cairbar, he was carried by his people to a neighbouring hill, which commanded a prospect of the sea. A fleet appeared at a distance, and the hero exclaims with joy—

Loingeas mo shean-athair at án,  
Siad a tiachd le cabhlair chugain,  
O Albin na n' ioma stuagh.

It is the fleet of my grandfather,  
Coming with aid to our field from  
Albion of many waves!

The testimony of the bard is sufficient to confute the idle fiction of Keating† and O'Flaherty, for though he is far from being ancient, it is probable he flourished a full century before the historians. From the instances given, the reader may form a complete idea of the Irish compositions concerning the Fiona. The greatest part of them make the heroes of Fion—

Siol Albin a n' nioma caoile.

The race of Albion of many firths.‡

On the 30th of January, 1894, the late Rev. Eugene O'Growney, Professor of Gaelic, Maynooth College, Ireland, lectured in Glasgow, on "Scotland in Irish Literature." As this learned scholar must have had his subject at his finger ends, it will no doubt be interesting to many who have heard so much about the "mother land" of the Scottish Gael to follow his evidence concerning all things ancient from an Irish standpoint. The Professor remarked that "at the present day, although we have no good history of the Irish literature, we can

† "The Livy of Irish Literature."

‡ "Disertation on the Poems of Ossian" by Hugh Campbell, 1822.

study its extent and character in O'Curry's 'Manuscript Materials of Ancient Irish History,' etc., and that the older Gaelic literature is to a great extent a common inheritance of Irishmen and Scotsmen, for it belongs to the time when the two countries formed one Gaelic nation with common language and literature. From his remarks the following may be gathered:—

"In the beginning there were no Gaels in Scotland, at least none known by that name." "Possibly the earlier tribes that peopled Scotland before the second century A.D. were also Gaelic or Celtic, but we have no certain knowledge of it." "Then, again, the name 'Scotland' did not belong to this country until the 10th century, so I shall call it by its old name of 'Alban.'" "We shall never know the true story of the ancient races that, coming from the East, populated Europe and these countries."

"Even in the earliest Irish traditions of which we have any knowledge, Ireland is represented as intimately connected with Scotland." Mael-Mura, of Donegal, who is said to have been the author of the "Duan Albannach," in describing the Milesian and Queen Scota who ruled over them before they came to Ireland, says she bare a son named "Gaedhal Glas," and from

#### THESE TWO PERSONAGES

came the name of Scoti or Scots, and Scotia or Scotland, and Gaedhil or Gaelic people! "Whence or when this powerful race arrived in Ireland we do not know; but as to its connection with Scotland, Irish legends depict them as having had from the first century before

the Christian era the most intimate connection with Alban." So much for Mr Mael-Mura's opinion. If the two countries had such intimate relations about the first century they must have spoken the same language, therefore it could not have died out in the third century—the era of Ossian—"Deirdire," Macpherson's "Darthula," he makes out a princess and a ward of King Conor Mac Nessa, by whom she was carefully guarded, but she eloped with one\* of the three sons of Usna, who, with his two brothers, made his way to Scotland. Here they dwelt for some time, and returned, relying upon the promises of Conor, who afterwards murdered them.

Mr Alexander Carmichael, in his interesting work, "Deirdire and the Lay of the Children of Uisne," makes this Irish beauty out to have been a daughter of Colum Cruitire (Colum the Harper), in the time of King Conachar, King of Ulster, and the three sons of Uisne. Naos, Ailleán, and Ardan, Scotsmen from the side of Loch Etive. Though there are many versions of the legend, Mr Carmichael seems to have successfully located Clann Uisne on the shores of Loch Etive. The place-names are too numerous to have resulted from a temporary residence of interlopers. The district of Loch Etive, says Mr Carmichael, is deeply identified with Deirdire (Darthula) and the sons of Uisne. "The old people who lived on the sides and at the head of Loch Etive, and among the glens and mountains in the vicinity, spoke much of 'Deirdire' and the sons of Uisne, and an old man named Duncan Macniven,

\* But does not give his name.



an itinerant teacher, who spent a long life amongst them, related that the people were full of old stories and old rhymes. The stories and poems were about everything—the sun and moon and stars, old feuds, battles, cattle raids, poems about Ossian, Oscar, Fion, and Cumhal and Cuchullin, etc., and that they were a grand people with all their old faults and beliefs.”

Professor O'Growney says that Cuchullin, the Achilles of the Irish poets, was almost a Scotsman, and that all old Irish traditions make him out a nephew of Conor, and after preparatory training at home, he was sent to the Isle of Skye to finish his military education at the college of arms at Dunsgaich, which was in these days open to the Gaelic world. This is one of the most surprising bits of Irish legend. One would think that the hero described in the “*Tain Bo Cuailgne*,” who slew “ten kings over seven fifties,” etc., in his boyhood, and was knighted at the age of seven, would not require to travel as far as remote Skye to learn the use of arms. There is something suspicious and superfluous here. It looks as if the Irish were determined to appropriate the chief of the “Isle of Mist,” and

#### MAKE AN IRISHMAN

of him. Even the etymology they give of the name is not satisfactory, viz., “*Cu-Chulain*” (Culan's dog). The name given him by Cathbad, the Druid, “*Guth-Ullin*” (the voice of Ulster), would be better, determined by his function as regent of the north of Ireland.

There is a better traditional story in Skye:—

Targlas, a bard in the north of Skye, hearing of Cuchullin's expedition to Ireland, comes to recite an ode he composed in his honour, but the fleet was under sail as he appeared upon the coast, and he recited the following fragment to Bragela, whom he found weeping on the sea shore:—

Air chùl cuairt mo shìubhail 's an trath  
maidne,

Tharnail mo cheum ri aodann chuain,  
Fa m' chomair san àird bhoisg bhrìste  
Thog air mo shùil cruinn seclaidh,  
Mar earb a thogas a eas ri àrd leacan;  
'N am sgàth 's nam chlisgeadh 'nam chom  
Ghrad ghlaodh mo mhae-meanmu an caithream  
Sud luingeas àrd laoch Eilean a' Cheò,  
Cuchullann an train fhear!

Following the course of my journey in the early morning, my footsteps rested in view of the sea. Opposite me in the heaven effulgent there rose to my vision the masts of sailing ships going like the roe when she lifts her foot to climb the steep hillside. From the fear and the startling of my frame my imaginative instinct caused me instantly to shout aloud—Yonder is the fleet of the illustrious hero of the Isle of Mist, Cuchullin the mighty!

Na thalla togaidh mi chliù le briathaibh  
deas dileas gu'n ruig e.

In his halls I shall sound his praise in words effectual and loyal that he may arrive in safety.

It is admitted by Professor O'Growney that there is strong traditional evidence that even before the Christian era Ireland was closely connected with Scotland by the marriage of chiefs and the reputation of Scotland as a training ground for warriors; but a more interesting fact is that Scotland was known to prehistoric Ireland as the school of poetry and learning, all of which is in favour of Ossian's poems having some foundation in fact.

At the end of

#### THE HEROIC PERIOD,

which, he says, coincided with the opening of the Christian era, Ireland and Scotland were practically Pagan for four centuries. "The very first entry in the Irish annals of this period has reference to Scotland. The population was divided into classes—the warrior or noble class and the bond class, the hewers of wood and drawers of water. The result of much oppression was that the bond people rose and almost annihilated the nobles." Amongst those who escaped was Queen Baine, who was of Scottish descent, and who fled into Scotland, where she gave birth to a son, who afterwards was restored to his throne in Ireland. This was at the beginning of the 1st century.

Soon afterwards we have three Irish monarchs, Conn, Art. and Cormac. Conn reigned in the first half of the second century, and his successor Conry was the father of Cairbre, Riada, from whom sprang the first Scots who came to Scotland, and who brought there the common use of the Gaelic language.

Let us see now how we stand. If the "migration into Scotland was continued for three centuries after the second century," there was no necessity for introducing them again at the end of the fifth century, for, according to E. W. B. Nicholson, the language of the Picts was identical with the Irish, differing far less from it than the dialects of some English counties from each other, which completely undermines all this Dalriadic theory and the "motherland" of the Gael. Coming down to Ossian, the learned Professor speaks with equal confidence when he says that "the Fiann are

represented as having lived in the fourth century in Ireland, but had offshoots in Scotland."

Similarly, when he says that "almost all the literature preserved in Scottish MSS. is poetic," it is another point in favour of Ossian. Though the whole of the poetic literature is in modern Gaelic, "no doubt the text was modernised, as every text is, century after century," "but we may assume with moral certainty that the Ossianic literature was begun in those days when

#### THE BARDIC SCHOOLS

flourished throughout the country towards the end of the sixth and seventh centuries." We are thankful for even this admission; but we squirm at the possibility of little of it having survived, "except an odd little poem written in the severe old Gaelic metre."

Popular literature would grow from generation to generation, and it is not at all likely to have been allowed to die out, though ecclesiastics, at different times, killed as much as they could of it. "The Irish Ossianic ballads are productions of the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries, written in the spoken Gaelic of the period. Many of the Scottish Ossianic ballads given in the Dean of Lismore's Book appear to be much older."

One objection to the Dean of Lismore's Book is that it can prove nothing. It was written at the beginning of the Reformation, and is in phonetic Gaelic, and the dialogues with St. Patrick are Irish, not Scotch. Anyhow, the "early prose Ossianic literature has been influenced to some extent by Scotland."

"In the 7th century a Scottish chief was obliged to fly into Ireland, and his passage is thus mentioned (O'Curry, ii., 164-6)—

"Well, now," said Cano, "we will go into the land of Erin to a friend of ours." A curach is made by his orders. They went down to the sea shore. This was the order in which they went down to the sea. Fifty warriors of them—a crimson five-fold cloak on each man, two flesh-seeking spears in hand a gold-rimmed shield at his back, a gold-hilted sword at his girdle, his gold-yellow hair falling down his back. This was the order in which their wives went with them—Each wore a green cloak with borders of silver, an inner garment interwoven with red gold thread, brooches of gold with earrings, and adorned with gems of many colours, necklaces of highly burnished gold, a diadem of gold on their heads. The fifty servants who went with them wore tunics of yellow silk; each bore on his back a chess board with gold and silver set of chess-men. A bronze harp in the left hand of each servant; two hounds on a silver chain in his right hand.

The curach which carried such an imposing company of swells and their retinue of servants must have been considerable, not the "frail" craft usually associated with the name of "curagh." While on this subject it may be as well to reply to the frequent objection made regarding ships being unknown to the Caledonians in the 3rd century. Cæsar describes the curachs as being accommodated with keels and masts of light wood. There is also evidence of the larger ones containing sleeping berths, besides masts and spars, the wicker work being covered with hides or leather. Lucan calls them "little ships," and adds that the Britons were wont to

#### NAVIGATE THE OCEAN.

In such curachs, according to Solinus, it was common to pass over from Ireland. Adamnan, in his life of St. Columba, describes one of these with all the parts of a ship with sails and oars, and with capacity for passengers, and adds that in this roomy currach St. Cormac sailed into the North Sea, where he remained fourteen days in perfect safety. The early Christians got as far as Iceland. Claudius, the poet, in the 4th century under Theodosius, says the Scottish rowers made the sea foam with their hostile oars.

In Joyce's "Social History of Ancient Ireland," it says that curachs intended for long voyages were made large and strong, finished with masts and solid decks and seats.

The knowledge of the ancient world was not shut up in compartments. The Phœnicians, in 1260 B.C., landed in Spain, and from Spain and Gaul passed over into England and Ireland.

The Celts and Scandinavians had plenty of opportunities of learning about Greek and Roman galleys. The "amber" route from the Adriatic to the Baltic is one of the oldest trade routes in the world, and there is the voyage of Pytheas, a Greek of Marseilles, contemporary with Alexander the Great, 300 B.C., who sailed up the English Channel to the coast of Norway, and heard of, if he did not reach the North Cape.

The Vikings had been infesting the Western Isles since the first century, and the Roman fleet had sailed round the coast of Britain, as did Ptolemy in the second century. During the latter

period of the Roman rule in Britain, the North Sea and the Channel were infested by Saxon pirates, who became such a scourge that the Romans appointed a special officer to look after the east coast. These facts seem to point out that to

#### CROSS THE GERMAN OCEAN

in those early times was quite feasible. Similarly, as regards the use of chariots and arrows, Tacitus relates that both were used at the battle of the Grampians by the Caledonians, and javelins as well.

In April, 1904, a highly finished sun chariot was discovered in a moor of Seeland, in Denmark. From the site where it was found, it is supposed to be no less than 3000 years old! It is now in the museum at Copenhagen, and an Etruscan chariot of 500 B.C. has recently been received into the Metropolitan Museum of Art of New York, for which, the smart American says, "the director of every European museum would give his eye teeth to possess it." And, to clinch the matter, Solomon had 1400 chariots.

In Chalmers's "Caledonia," it is said that the armouries of the Britons were generally furnished with helmets,\* shields, spears, daggers, swords, battle axes, and bows and arrows, and the common men fought on foot provided with shields, spears, swords, bows, and battle axes. These accoutrements have been mostly found in the graves of the warrior. Ossian speaks of stags' antlers being buried with Oscar. Very strange to say, this mode of ancient burial was

unknown at the time James Macpherson's "Ossian" was first published.

The people who talk of Ossian's poems as being "unidiomatic Gaelic" are as often as not critics who do not know one single word of Gaelic! When a Gaelic scholar like Patrick MacGregor, MA., who translated all Ossian's poems from the Gaelic we have, speaks of them as being "remarkable for their idiomatic and concise style," his opinion is surely worth more than that of a non-Gaelic speaking individual who can't go into the case, and better than of a Celtic scholar who goes entirely by artificial grammatical rules. Who can tell what was considered idiomatic in the 3rd century or much later, when the clerics of Deer, in the 12th century, misplaced nouns and adjectives, and spelt the same word differently in the same page? We need not go any further. Professor Blackie held that the English of "Ossian" is "forced and unidiomatic." When philologists differ, who is to decide the question?

The everlasting objection made to these poems is that they are sombre and melancholy, too full of sentiment, "bombast," and "turgid nonsense!" The people who can see no beauty in "Ossian" are beyond arguing with. They are devoid of the poetic soul. Why, it is sentiment that keeps us together as a human family. Life would not be worth living without it. It is a sign of refined feelings. All the poets have it more or less. It seems part and parcel of our existence, and the more imaginative it is the higher the chord it strikes. A man who takes his "Ossian" from the "Encyclopædia

\* Diodorus Siculus mentions that the Celts wore helmets (frequently mentioned in "Ossian"). See Anderson's "Scotland in Pagan Times."

Brittannica." believes in a chimera. That James Macpherson mixed the supposed heroes of two supposed different cycles—that is no proof that he had no originals. These cycles of romance are entirely legendary, and have no historical basis, and are absolutely worthless to found an argument upon; whereas the poems of Ossian, whether founded on fact or fable, are magnificent relics of bygone ages. Similarly with regard to the battle of "Gabhra," we do not know when it was fought, as Ireland had no authentic history at the time it is supposed to have happened. It behoves us, therefore, to approach dates at such an early age with the greatest possible caution. The Roman historians are far more reliable than ours, as they wrote of us, not for us.

Among the poems of Ossian are many pieces of exceeding strength and beauty, which could only have been accomplished by a man of

#### IMMENSE NATURAL GENIUS,

which Macpherson's best friends would never dream of claiming for him.

Many able men and Gaelic scholars have criticised these poems from several standpoints; but two of the most competent in recent times were the Rev. Dr. Clerk, of Kilmallie, already largely drawn upon, and the late Rev. Thomas Pattison, author of "The Gaelic Bards" (1866), an Islay man, an excellent Gaelic-scholar, and a man of exemplary piety and capable judgment. His opinion was:—

When we consider that the finest parts of Macpherson's Ossian are incontestably proved to have been popular poetry long anterior to his appearing. I think we should throw all

prejudice aside and affirm that whoever composed the poems attributed to Ossian, James Macpherson was not the man; and that whatever merit may belong to him as a translator, or whatever claim he may have to be considered their compiler, in their present form he has no legitimate title to be called their author.

Then the question comes, if James Macpherson was not the author, who was? That is just what we are trying to get at by a process of synthesis and exclusion. There is no use in our breaking our hearts over dates so far back as the early centuries. Whether in the "War of Caros" Oscar fought, as already mentioned, against Carausius, "King of Ships," or against some other Caros, cannot be ascertained for certain. The poem describes Oscar as distinguishing himself in battle against Caros at the river Carron. The usurper Carausius, who assumed the purple in 284 or 287, seized Britain, and defeated the Emperor Maximian Herculus in several naval engagements. If this was the Caros of the poem, it would make Fingal, who fought on the Carron in 211 A.D., old, as he was still alive when Oscar was killed by Cairbar in 284 or 296 (Book I. of "Temora").

Irish histories place the death of Fingal, the son of Cumhal, in 283, and Oscar and Cairbar in 296. If the Irish histories are true, Fingal could not have seen the death of Oscar in 284 or 296; but there is no reliance to be placed on bare dates so far back as the 2nd or 3rd century. Were it not for the Roman writers, the thing would not be worth wasting ink upon.

Some writers argue with great pertin-

acity on the strength of these legendary dates, which can have no pretention to

REAL HISTORICAL ACCURACY,

and of course create a great deal of confusion. Some say Fingal died in 252, others in 283, and others, again, in 286. That the battle of Gabhra was fought in 284; others, again, say it was in 250 A.D. The strongest evidence we have is that the battle fought between Fingal and Caracalla was in 211 A.D., but of even that event we can't be certain. There might have been several battles. Similarly with regard to Oscar, Caros, or Carausius, it can only be guess work.

To reduce all these dates and events into order requires the greatest possible caution, as it might land us in a plight similar to the "Dalriadic delusion!" According to O'Growney, the Dannan's, or people of Danu—who was their chief goddess—are represented in legendary lore as having come to Ireland from Scotland,\* and the Firbolgs reached the Western Isles and erected their stone circles there and elsewhere.

As these remarks may be read at some future time after this generation has passed away, the following letter written from New Zealand on the 25th January, 1902, may be of some interest as bearing upon the genuineness of Ossian's poems. The incident referred to related to a Gaelic copy of the poems picked up in a field on the slopes of Cruachan, near Bonaw, in Argyllshire, many years ago:

Masterton, New Zealand,  
25th January, 1902.

[TO THE EDITOR OF "THE OBAN TIMES."]

SIR,—In your issue of the 16th December, 1901, which has just arrived in this remote

part of the British Colonies, I have read with the fullest appreciation the letter of Dr. Keith MacDonald on the veracity of James Macpherson and on the genuine quality of our grand old Ossianic epics. In order to shield one of his statements from being questioned by those who are puffed up with too little real knowledge, may I be allowed to state the fact as it was given to me from the lips of my near relative, who found the Gaelic copy of Ossian, as quoted by Dr. Keith MacDonald? It was not William Whyte who found the book, but Daniel Johnston, his wife's nephew, and afterwards their son-in-law.

William Whyte was a Lowlander, and learned Gaelic after coming to the Highlands. Daniel Johnston knew Gaelic from his boyhood, and was well able to read it. When a boy he found the book in a field and took it home to his old grandfather, who was too blind to read it; but the boy was able to do so, and his grandfather listened eagerly, in order to judge whether the poems were worthily presented to the public. He was abundantly satisfied and delighted, and expressed himself to that effect, saying that they were faithfully rendered, and were such as he had known them all his life. He was a generation older than William Whyte.

This grain of fact was repeated to me in youth by my uncle, the late Mr David Johnston, and kept my faith in the genuine character of our noble heritage of poetry firm and unshaken. A grain of fact is worth any amount of speculation.

As regards the memories of these old folks, I know many instances of people who could go on endlessly repeating psalms and old songs. There were three persons at one time living at Bonawe who could have restored between them every verse of the Bible had the book been lost. William Whyte was one of these three.—I am, etc.,

A GRANDDAUGHTER OF WILLIAM WHYTE.

Bearing on the same question is the following letter from a Skye correspond-



ent to "The Oban Times," of the 8th February, 1902:—

"OSSIAN OR NO OSSIAN."

[TO THE EDITOR OF "THE OLAN TIMES."]

Sir,—For the benefit of those of your readers who are interested in the above, I beg to send you the following paragraph from the "Historical Sketch" of the parish of Kilmuir, Skye, in the "New Statistical Account of Scotland," Vol. XIV. It was written in 1840 by the late learned enthusiastic Highlander, Rev. Alexander MacGregor, M.A., Inverness, who was the author of the "Life of Flora MacDonald," etc., etc., and the well-known contributor ("Alasdair Ruadh" and "Sgiathanach") of the Highland periodicals of his day. He was at the time assistant to his father, Rev. Robert MacGregor, minister of Kilmuir:—

In the district of Stenchool a man died 12 years ago (1828) named John Nicolson, or MacCormaic at the very advanced age of 105 years. There is one circumstance connected with the old man's history worthy of notice, which is, that he could repeat the most of Ossian's Fingal, Temora, &c., with great fluency and precision. The writer of this heard him say that he committed these beautiful poems to memory from hearing them repeated, when a boy, by his grandfather. If this fact be not sufficient to establish the authenticity of these unparalleled poems, it must surely establish the fact that they existed before the time of Macpherson, who attempted to translate them into the English language. The silly allegation by some that Ossian's poems were Macpherson's own productions is palpably confuted by MacCormaic, and others who could repeat them before Macpherson was born. But should that not have been the case, and should none have been found who could rehearse them before Macpherson's time, the allegation that they were either by Macpherson, or any other in the age in which he lived, appears ridiculous in the sight of such as know the construction and beauty of the Celtic language.

—I am, etc.,

AIRIDH UIGE.

I have now gone over the salient points of the Ossianic controversy, and pointed out how improbable, nay, impossible it would have been for a young man under twenty-five to have produced such poems as Ossian's, displaying as they do vast

genius far beyond anything else that James Macpherson produced, and then to have suddenly stopped—though he lived many years after—and never courted the poetic muse again.

I also produced the testimony of living witnesses of the highest respectability who had actually seen many MSS. in James Macpherson's hands and who had assisted him in translating them; and showed that he did

PRODUCE HIS ORIGINALS,

and left them at his publishers\* for a period of about twelve months, for the inspection of the public, and that he afterwards handed over all the Gaelic MSS. in his possession that had not been lost or destroyed to Mr John MacKenzie, of the Temple, London; that he was incapable of composing them; and that he was not the author of them, but merely the translator.

I also pointed out the reason why the philologists have no case, how they disagree among themselves, and give the most opposite and absurd reasons for their conclusions; that although able Celtic scholars have condemned the poems, equally great scholars have upheld and praised them; that one of the main contentions of the historians and Celtic scholars regarding the introduction of Gaelic by an Irish colony into Scotland is, according to "recent researches," in a fair way of being proved a "myth" and a "delusion," ergo, that Ireland was not the "mother land" of the Gael or of his language, and that in consequence one of the greatest stumbling blocks against

\* Beckett and De Houdt, Strand, London.

Ossian having been able to speak Gaelic in the 3rd century, is being smashed to atoms; that there were other collections of Ossianic Gaelic poetry made besides Macpherson's, which agreed almost entirely with them, and also that there was an immense amount of ancient Gaelic poems floating all over the Highlands besides those published by Macpherson; that the Bards who succeeded the Druids were the custodians of the annals of the people, and carried these poems down from generation to generation, assisted by the powerful memories which were developed by the genius of the people themselves through their love of poetry, heroism, and gallantry, so that these recitations formed their main occupation in the long winter nights, and consequently helped very much to preserve the poems; that the supposed impossibility of the Caledonians being able to visit Norway (Lochlin) in the 3rd century is no more extraordinary than that the Danes should be in Scotland in the 1st century, in the time of Agricola,† that in short

#### ALL THE OBJECTIONS

have been answered, and all the difficulties overcome and explained; and it has been proved as clearly as anything can be that Fingal lived and that Ossian sang and that James Macpherson was only a translator of Ossian's poems. Further, that all he did in the way of taking liberties with the poems was to join some of them together when they related to the same

subject to make long epics of them. To what extent interpolations may have been introduced, it is impossible to say, but it is very singular that the two missing lines at the end of "Carthor" were not substituted.

Upon the whole, we are justified in concluding that he did no more in that respect than any translator would have done, for whatever else is ancient about them, the syntax is.

Any intelligent person who examines the subject of the Ossianic poems impartially, and with an open mind, goes over the literature of the subject, and who understands Gaelic, and can read Gaelic poetry, and even if he can't, he can hardly fail to be struck with the uncommon cast of the poetry, its bold and figurative language, its beautiful imagery, graphic word-painting, and intense pathos, and all relating to an age of which we now know very little indeed. How in all this Mac-Fingal (Ossian) stuck to his text is clear enough; but how James Macpherson, if he were the author, adhered to an

#### ANCIENT STATE OF EXISTENCE,

without once betraying himself and his subject in his descriptions and allusions, is not so clear, and considering that Macpherson was never in Ireland and never had any MSS. from that country, it is singular, to say the least of it, how he managed to portray battles that had occurred at a remote period in a locality of which he knew little or nothing, the conviction is forced upon us that no one but a living actor, who had taken part in these contests could have done it. But what are we to think of Macpherson's

† According to Boece, the Danes were in Scotland at the time of Agricola, and Saxo Grammaticus tells us of incursions by the Northmen long before the 8th century.—"Hist. of Outer Hebrides," MacKenzie.

own countrymen who denounced him as a forger and a liar for having brought to light these beautiful relics of the past? This patriotic Highlander, to whom the literary world will for all time be indebted for much that is sublime and lofty in human sentiment in an early state of existence in this land of the "noble and the free," certainly deserved a better fate. There is no country in the world, certainly no civilised country especially in modern times, that would have showered such obloquy upon a patriot of letters as fell to the lot of James Macpherson.

It is a shame and a disgrace that he should have been so treated by his own countrymen. Though there is much about these poems that will never be known beyond what we have got, it is futile to deny that he had any originals except the ballads, which he rejected as being non-Ossianic. The subject has been thrashed to depletion and re-hashed, and the outcome of the whole controversy up to date has been to place these poems more and more upon a firm and permanent basis. And as time passes, and as passion, bias, and prejudice subside, due credit will be given to James Macpherson for having rescued them from oblivion, to the Highlanders and their bards and

seanachies for having handed them down from

#### GENERATION TO GENERATION,

and to Ossian, Britain's first, and one of her greatest poets, for having originated the language in which they are couched.

When these things are admitted, as assuredly they will be, the pedagogues of the Encyclopædias may well "creep to their caves." It will then dawn upon a misguided and ignorant public that the few Celts who have been renegades to the literature of their own country and their people have done more harm in the past than a thousand patriots could do of good.

Ossian stands alone, and without a compeer in his own line, and will continue to be so in all time coming, for of all poets, ancient or modern, he is the most heroic, pathetic, and sublime, with a depth of solemnity and radiance of sublimity that does not belong to James Macpherson nor to anyone else in the poetical arena of poets, and there he shall remain. In each succeeding generation men will arise to criticise the judgment of present-day theorists, ogam readers, and antagonists; but nothing will ever dim the radiant splendour of the poetical lustre of the poems of Ossian.

FINIS.

# APPENDIX.

AS I consider a knowledge of Gaelic an absolute necessity to any one who aspires to judge correctly of the poems of Ossian, or to arrive at a just conclusion regarding them, the following striking passages are appended to illustrate the force of the language in contrast with the English text. Of all the non-Gaelic commentators who have approached this subject, Dr. Hugh Blair, Professor of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres in the University of Edinburgh, and the late Dr. P. Hately Waddell were far and away the ablest; and amongst the Gaelic scholars who made a thorough investigation into the pros. and cons. of the controversy, the Rev. Dr. Graham, Aberfoyle; Archibald Clerk, Kilmallie; Alexander Cameron, Brodick; Rev. Thomas Pattison, author of "The Gaelic Bards"; Patrick MacGregor, M.A., Barrister; and Professor Blackie have recorded facts in favour of Ossian that have never been answered or refuted by adverse critics with any degree of satisfaction, so that as far as absolute proof of the genuineness of these poems is concerned, the balance of competent and unprejudiced Gaelic thinkers is in favour of their authenticity as a whole, though not exactly in the state they were collected:—

*From Fingal, Duan I., line 383.  
"Cuchullin in his Chariot"*

'S a' charbad eithear an triath,  
Sàr mhac treun nan genr lann,  
Cuchullin nan gorm-bhallach sgiath,  
Mac Sheuma, mu-n éireadh dàn;  
A ghruaidh mar an t-uthar caoin,  
A shùil nach b' fhaoin a' sgaoilcadh àrd  
Fò mhala chròim, dhòrcha, chaol,  
A chiabh bhuidhe 'n a caoir m' a cheann,  
'Taomadh mu ghnuis àluinn an fhir,  
'S e 'tarruing a shleagh o' chùil:  
Teich-sa, 'shar cheannaird nan long,  
Teich o' n t-sonn, 's e 'tigh 'n a nall  
Mur ghaillinn o ghleann nan sruth!

*Literal translation throughout.*

In the chariot is seen the chief,  
True brave son of the keen brands,  
Cuchullin of blue-spotted shields,

Son of Semo, renowned in song;  
His cheek like the polished yew,  
His clear far-ranging eye,  
Under arched, dark and slender brow,  
His yellow hair down streaming from his head  
Flows round his glorious face  
As he draws his spear from his back:  
Flee, thou great ruler of ships! (Swaran)  
Flee from the hero who comes on  
As a storm from the glen of torrents!

*The hosts of Swaran and Cuchullin engage in  
battle—conflict described.*

Mar thoirm fhoghair o dhà bheinn,  
Gu 'chéile tharruing na suinn,  
Mar shruth làidir o dhà chreig  
'G aomadh, taomadh, air an réidh,  
Fuaimcar, dorch, garbh 's a' bhàir  
Thachair Innisfàil 'ns Lochlin;  
Ceannard a' spealt-chleas ri ceannard,  
'Us duine 'n aghaidh gach duine:  
Bha cruaidh a' creacadan air cruaidh,  
Bha eologaidean shuas 'g an sgoltadh,  
Fuil a' dèrtadh dlùth mu 'n cuairt,  
Taifeid a' fuaim air min inthar,  
Gathan a' sìubhal tro' 'n speur  
Sleaghan 'bualadh—tuiteam thall.

\* Like roar of autumn from two bens,  
Against each other rushed the warriors,  
Like strong torrents from two crags  
Sweeping, flooding over the plain,  
Loud-sounding, dark (and) rough in battle  
Encountered Innis-fail and Lochlin;  
Chief with chief at clearing sword play,  
Man confronting man,  
Steel was griding on steel,  
Helmets cloven on high,  
Blood quick-spilling all round,  
Bow-string twanging on smooth yew,  
Darts speeding through the sky,  
Spears clashing, men falling.

*A description of the further progress of the battle.  
Fingal, Duan I., line 480.*

Mar dh' aomas mìle tonn gu tràigh,  
A ghluais fo Shuaran an dàimh:  
Mar thachras tràigh ri mìle tonn,  
Thachair Eirinn ri Swaran nan long.  
Sin far an robh guthan a' bhàis,  
Toirm gàire-cath, 'us cruaidh,  
Sgiathan 's màile brist' air lùr,  
Lann 's gach làmh, 'n a dheulan shuas,  
Fuaim a' bhàir o thaobh gu taobh,

Còmhrag beueach, creuchdach, teth,  
Mar cheud òrd a' bualadh baoth,  
Caoir o' n teallach dhearg mu seach

As come down a thousand waves on the shore,  
Rushed the invaders under Swaran;  
As meets the shore a thousand waves,  
So Erin met Swaran of ships.  
There were the voices of death,  
The noise of battle-shout, and crash of arms,  
Shield and mail lay shivered on the field,  
In every hand a blade like lightning-flash on high.  
The noise of battle spread from side to side,  
Crashing, gashing, red-hot fight,  
Like hundred hammers madly striking,  
Spark-shower from ruddy fire by turns.

*Cuchullin's stand against the victorious Swaran  
on the second day of the battle. Fingal, Duan  
II., line 281.*

Dh' imich Suaran, rìgh nam buadh,  
Mar mhòr-shruth fuar nam fas-bheann,  
'Nuair thuiteas a' bhruaich le 'luas,  
'S na cùirn a' gluasad 's a' ghleann;  
Sheas Cuchullin treun 'n a chomhair  
Mar chruaich mhòir mu-n sgaoil an nial:  
Bhi cleasachd na gaoithe mu 'sòrr,  
'S a' ghùibhsach chòrr air taobh nan slàbh  
'S a' chlach-mheallain a' breabadh air creig:  
Seasaidh creag 'n a neart gu h-àrd,  
'Cur fasgaidh air tlàth-ghleann Chòna.  
Swaran swept on, the conquering king,  
Like great, cold torrents of the desert bens,  
When falls the bank before its force,  
And cairns are swept along the glen;  
Cuchullin stood firm before him  
Like cloud-dispersing massive crag:  
Raves the wind around its scor,  
And 'mid lofty pines on the mountain side,  
While the hail rebounds against the rock:  
The crag in its strength stands on high  
Sheltering the warm glen of Cona.

*Duan III., line 352.*

Or let us take the passages when Fingal and Swaran met after the repulse of Cuchullin. When Fingal saw Swaran, the brother of Agan-decca, his first love, he sent Ulin, his bard, to invite him to feast with him on the shore on the day of his arrival, offering battle on the second. Swaran refuses the invitation, and insists on engaging immediately.

"N diugh féin," thuir MacStàirn, "an dingh féin  
Briscam 's a' bheinn an t-sleagh.  
'Màireach bi' dh do rìgh-sa gun gbleus,  
Agus Suaran 's a' thréin aig fleagh."  
"Am màireach biodh fleagh aig an triath,"  
Thuir rìgh Mhòirbheinn fo fhiamh-ghàire.

"N diugh enream an còmhrag air slàbh,  
'S briseadhmaid an sgiath 'bu shàr  
'Oisein, seas suas ri mo làmh,  
'Ghaill, togsa do lann, fhir mhòir;  
'Fhearghuis, tarruing taifeid nach mall;  
'Tilgs', Fhillein, do chran 'bu chorr.  
Togaibhs' ur sgiathan gu h-àrd,  
Mar ghealaich fo sgàil 'an speur:  
Biodh 'ur sleaghan mar theachdair' a' bhàis;  
Leanaibh, leanaibh mo chliù 's mi féin;  
Bi 'bh coineas do cheud 's a' bhlàr."

"This very day," said Starno's son; "this very day  
Shall I break the spear on the hill;  
"To-morrow powerless shall be thy King,  
Swaran and his strong ones shall feast."  
"To-morrow let the hero feast,"  
The King of great Bens, smiling said:  
"To-day I fight the battle on the hill:  
And break we the shield so strong.  
Ossian, stand thou close to my hand;  
Gaul, thou great one, lift thy brand;  
Fergus, draw thy speeding bow-string;  
Fillan, throw thy lance unmatched;  
Raise ye on high your shields  
Like a clouded moon in the sky:  
Be your spears as messengers of death:  
Follow, follow my renown and me;  
Match a hundred in the battle."

*The conflict described, line 369.*

Mar cheud gaoth 'an daraig Mhòirbheinn,  
Mar cheud sruth o' thòrr nan aonach,  
Mar neoil a' curradh gu dùbhlaidh,  
Mar chuan mòr air traigh a' taomadh,  
Cho leathann, beueach, dorch, borb  
Thachair laoi ch fholg air Léna.  
Bha gairm an t-sluaigh air cruaidh nam beann,  
Mar thorunn 'an oidheann nan sian  
'Nuair bhriseas nial Chona nan gheann,  
'Us mla taibhs a' sgreadh gu dian  
Air gaoith fhaoin fhiar nan earn."

As hundred winds 'mid oaks of great mountains,  
As hundred torrents from lofty hills,  
As clouds in darkness rushing on,  
As the great ocean rolling on the shore.  
So vast, so sounding, dark and stern,  
Met the fierce warriors on Léna.  
The shout of the host on mountain height  
Was like thunder on a night of storms,  
When bursts the cloud in Cona of glens,  
And thousand spirits wildly shriek  
On the waste wind that sweeps around the cairns.

Though Ossian mourns the death of his father in the third book of Fingal, he is still fighting Swaran in Duan V. No doubt some of the poems have been lost, and some misplaced, as there is nothing to show how Fingal died, whether in battle or of old age; but one thing is clear, he

died before Ossian, and it is very remarkable that there is no special poem concerning his death apart from the two short notices in Duan III., line 508, and Duan V., line 420.

'S iomadh là agus oidhch' fhuar  
A shuidheam aig d'uaigh fo'n chàrn ;  
Dh' fhaireagham fo m' làmh f' s' a chruaich.

Many a day and chilly night  
Have I sat by thy grave beneath the cairn ;  
I touch it with my hands upon the hill.

One of the most powerful pieces of world-painting in Ossian is the great combat between the two kings, Fingal and Swaran, when they engage single-handed.

*Duan V., line 43.*

'N sin bha torunn treun nan àrn ;  
Gach buille bu gharbh agus beum ;  
Mar cheud òrd ag èirigh ard,  
Air cruaidh theallaich 's deirge caoir.  
B' fhuathasach comhrag an dà rìgh ;  
Bu ghruamach 's an strì an tuar ;  
An sgiath dhonn a' sgoltadh fo bheum,  
Lannan geur a' leum o chruaidh.  
Thiig gach ball àirm air an rèidh,  
Ghabh na laoiach 's a' chéile luath.  
Bha gach ruighe fèitheach mòr  
'G iadh mu dhrùim garbh nan sonn.  
A' fionndadh o thaobh gu thaobh,  
An mòr chosan 'sgaoileadh air lom.  
'Nuair dh' èirich àrdan neart nan treun  
Chrith an càthar fèin fo'n sàil.  
Chrìothnaich clach 'us crnach 'us càrn,  
'S coill' uaine fo spàirn nau laoch.  
Mu 'dheireadh thuit neart nan tonn,  
Chaidh Swaran nan long fo chis.

There was the loud thunder of arms.  
Heavy each buffet and each cleaving blow—  
Like hundred hammers, rising high,  
On steel from fire of ruddy flame.  
Awful was the struggle of the kings ;  
Stern was their aspect in the fight.  
The dark-brown shield was cleft beneath their blows.

Sharp swords rebounded from the steel,  
They flung each piece of armour on the plain  
Instant the heroes grappled ;  
Each great and sinewy arm  
Closed round the broad back of a hero ;  
They whirled from side to side.  
Their great feet wide apart on the plain  
When the strength pride of the strong arose,  
Shook the very moor beneath their heels,  
Trembled stones and crags and cairns,  
And the green-wood under the hero-struggle.  
At length the strength of the waves fell down—  
Swaran of ships was overpowered.

There is not much effeminacy or melancholy displayed in these passages, nor in the following terribly sublime picture of Cuchullin's aspect in war :—" He rushed in the sound of his arms, like the dreadful spirit of Loda when he comes in the roar of a thousand storms, and scatters battles from his eyes. He sits on a cloud over Lochlin's seas. His mighty hand is on his sword. The

winds lift his flaming locks, so terrible was Cuchullin in the day of his fame."

I shall now introduce a few ghost scenes which should be read about midnight, the hour at which uncanny spirits visit mother-earth. As the vast majority of educated and uneducated people are more or less superstitious, these passages should have special interest for them. The following superstitious practices are exceedingly common all over this country :—Hanging a horse-shoe, for luck, on the front door of a house ; throwing salt over the left shoulder ; avoiding thirteen at a meal ; and disinclination to marry in May. The three latter are very prevalent in Edinburgh, also belief in dreams and second-sights ; and even the spell of the evil eye has not yet died out amongst us.

The engagement of Fingal with the spirit of Loda in *Carrie-Thura* will first occupy our attention as being full of amazing and terrible majesty. There is no passage more sublime in the writings of any uninspired author. The scene of this encounter is laid in Innistore, or the Orkney Islands. In confirmation of Ossian's topography there are many pillars and circles of stones still remaining known by the name of the stones and circles of Loda, or Loden. These islands, until 1468, formed a part of the Danish dominions.\*

*Carrie-Thura, line 232.*

Dh' islich teine fada thall,  
A Ghealach dearg 'us mall 's an ear,  
Thàinig osna mas o'n chàrn ;  
Air a sgiathan bha sàmhla fir,  
Cruth-Loduinn 's an lear gun tuar—  
Thàinig e gu 'chòmhnuidh fèin,  
A dùbhr-shleagh gun fheum 'n a làimh,  
A dhearg-shùil mar theine nan speur,  
Mar thorunn an t-sleibh a ghinht,  
An dùbhra dùbhr fada thall.  
Thog Fiomghal 's an oidhch' a shleagh,  
Chualas anns a' m'bhagh a ghairm.

A fire descended far away,  
The moon was red and dull in the east,  
Came down a blast from the height ;  
On its wings was semblance of a man,  
Cru-Lodin wan, upon the plain—  
He came unto his own abode,  
His black spear useless in his hand ;  
His red eye like fire of the skies ;  
Like thunder on the hill his voice ;  
In darkness black and far away  
Raised Fionn, amidst the night his spear,  
Heard on the plain was his shout.

\* Critical Dissertation on the poems of Ossian, by Dr. Hugh Blair, Edinburgh.



Fingal commands him to depart and expresses his contempt for his weakness.

*Line 244.*

A mhic na h-oidheche, o mo thaobh;  
Gabh a' ghaoth, agus bi falbh;  
C' uim' thigeadh tu 'm fhianuis, fhir fhaoin;  
Do shamhla cho baoth ri d' àirm?  
An eagal dhomhsa do chruth donn,  
Fhuathais nan cròm 'th' aig Loduin?  
'S lag do sgiath 's do nial nach trom,  
Do chlaidheamh lom mar thein' air mòr-thuinn.  
Cuiridh osag iads' as a chèile,  
Agus sgaoilear thu féin gun dail.  
As m' fhianuis, a dhubb-mhic nan speur;  
Gairm d' osag dhuit féin, 's bi falbh!

Son of the night, from my side!  
Take the wind, and be thou gone!  
Why to my presence come, thou shadowy one,  
Thy semblance vain as are thine arms?  
Is thy dusky form a terror unto me,  
Thou phantom of the circles at Lodin?  
Weak is thy shield, weightless thy cloud,  
Thy bare sword like fire on the great waves,  
A blast will drive them asunder,  
And scattered thyself wilt be without delay.  
Out of my presence, dark son of the skies,  
Call thy blast to thyself, and begone!

Cru-Lodin remonstrates, boasts of his power over men's lives, and over the tempests of the air. Fingal again bids him begone, and defies him; the two engage in combat; Fingal's sword flashes through the spectre, and scatters him on the wind.

*Line 294.*

Thog e gu b-àrd a sleagha dhorch;  
Th' aom e gu borb a cheann ard;  
Ghabh Fionnghal 'n a aghaidh le colg,  
A chlaidheamh glan gorm 'n a làimh.  
Mac-an-Luinn, bu chlar-dhubb gruaidh—  
Ghluaissolus na cruaidhe troi 'n taibhs',  
Fhuathas dona 'bhais fo ghruaim.  
Thuit esan gun chruth, 's e thall,  
Air gaoith nan dubh-chàrn mar smùid  
Bhriseas òg 'us bioran 'n a làimh,  
Mu theallach na spairn 's na mùig.

He raised aloft his spear of darkness;  
Stooped fiercely his lofty head;  
Fingal went against him in wrath,  
His bright blue sword in his hand—  
Sun of Luno of swarthest cheek.  
Moved the light of the steel through the spectre,  
The evil wraith of death went under gloom;  
He fell without shape, and away  
On wind of the black cafrins, like smoke  
Which a boy, with stick in hand, raises  
Around a hearth of discord and of gloom.

*Line 305.*

Scread fuathas Chruth-Loduin's a' bheinn,  
G' a thional ann féin 's a' ghaoith.  
Chual' Innis nan torc an fhuaim;  
Chaisg astar nan stuadh le fhuaim;  
Th' eirich gaisgich mhie Chumhal nam buadh;

Bha sleagh's gach làimh shuas's an t-sliabh,  
"C' àite 'bheil e?" 'S am fearg fo ghruaim.  
Gach màile ri fuaim m' a thràith.

Shrieked the wraith of Cru-Lodin on the ben;  
Gathering himself into himself in the wind;  
Heard Innis-Torca the sound;  
Ceased the travel of the waves in fear;  
Arose the heroes of Chumhal's great son;  
A spear was up in each hand on the hill.  
"Where is he?" their wrath darkening,  
And each man's mail loud rattling round it's lord.

Better still is the appearance of the ghost of Tremnor to Oscar in the "War of Caros," one of the minor poems for which Macpherson left no Gaelic.

"Oscar slowly ascends the hill. The meteors of night set on the heath before him. A distant torrent faintly roars: Unfrequent blasts rush through aged oaks. The half-enlightened moon sinks dim and red behind her hill. Feeble voices are heard on the hill. Oscar drew his sword.

"Come," said the hero, 'O ye ghosts of my fathers, ye that fought against the kings of the world! Tell me the deeds of future times; and your converse in your caves, when you talk together, and behold your sons in the fields of the brave.'

"Tremnor came from his hill at the voice of his mighty son. A cloud like the steed of the stranger, supported his airy limbs. His robe is of the mist of Luno, that brings death to the people. His sword is a green meteor half-extinguished. His face is without form and dark. He sighed thrice over the hero; thrice the winds of night roared around! Many were his words to Oscar; but they only came by halves to our ears; they were dark as the tales of other times before the light of song arose. He slowly vanished, like mist that melts on the sunny hill."

The poet's winding up of this poem is also very fine—

"Darkness comes on my soul, O fair daughter of Toscar! I behold not the form of my son at Carun, nor the figure of Oscar on Cromma. The rustling winds have carried him far away, and the heart of his father is sad. But lead me, O Malvina! to the sound of my woods; to the roar of my mountain streams. Let the chase be heard on Cona; let me think on the days of other years. And bring me the harp, O maid! that I may touch it, when the light of my soul shall arise. Be thou near to learn the song: future times shall hear of me! The sons of the feeble hereafter will lift the voice on Cona; and looking up to the rocks, say, 'Here Ossian dwelt.' They shall admire the chiefs of old, the race that are no more! while we ride on our clouds, Malvina! on the wings of the roaring winds. Our voices shall be heard, at times, in the desert; we shall sing on the breeze of the rock."

\* The poet here speaks with the solemnity and confidence of an inspired individual. He feels that his poems will stand the test of time, when he requests Malvina to be near him to learn the song for transmission to posterity. To one who has visited Glencoe it seems an exceedingly natural way of describing it. "The sons of the feeble hereafter will lift the voice on Cona; and looking up to the rocks, say, 'Here Ossian dwelt.'"











